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THE OXFORD STAMP AND OTHER ESSAYS

ARTICLES FROM THE EDUCATIONAL
CREED OF AN AMERICAN OXONIAN

BY

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NEW YORK

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

AMERICAN BRANCH : 35 WEST 32ND STREET

LONDON, TORONTO, MELBOURNE, AND BOMBAY

1917

148029
11/11/19

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OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

AMERICAN BRANCH

THE QUINN & BODEN CO. PRESS
RAHWAY, N. J.

PREFACE

THE essays collected in this volume are all fruits of a Rhodes Scholarship. The holder of one of these appointments, who on his return from Oxford engages in university teaching in this country, inevitably makes comparisons, and looks at many of our educational problems from a new point of view. Much in the work and atmosphere of an English university is strikingly different from the adaptations of German university methods which have prevailed in our higher education for half a century. In the hope that this point of view may interest students of our educational problems, these essays are put together.

That the volume deals more with the study of English than with any other subject is due primarily to the fact that the writer is a teacher of English. It seems also that the time is fast approaching when the study of English in our

universities is destined to have the same importance and popularity as a means to liberal and literary education that the classics have so long enjoyed at Oxford. From the Oxford school of *Literæ Humaniores* hints and suggestions can be drawn which point to a wider opportunity for our study of the literature of our own tongue.

It is a curious fact, if the position maintained in these pages be correct, that the point of view which is responsible for the thinness and futility of much of our study of English in America during the last forty years was inherited from the study of the classics as pursued in this country in the middle of the last century, while the point of view which is now gaining in popularity and which, in the opinion of the writer, is destined to be the salvation of our English studies, has much in common with the Oxford study of the literatures of Greece and Rome. Our study of the classics and of English literature as well has tended to confine itself to *belles-lettres*, while the study of the classics at Oxford owes its distinction to the fact that it is a study of Greek and Roman civilization.

This whole matter is discussed more fully in the fifth essay below, and those that follow describe the writer's attempt to draw conclusions for English studies from the principles there laid down. If all this sounds more like the dream of an Oxford undergraduate than the sober sense needed in a practical American university, it may be said, in answer, that this book represents not merely the theories of a student at Oxford, but also the experience of ten years of practical application of these ideas in elementary and advanced courses at Indiana University and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

The picture of Oxford given in these essays goes back, already such a long way, to the years before 1914. It is to be assumed that the war will make far-reaching changes in English education and in Oxford, as in everything else. New degrees and new courses are already being planned to meet the demands of the new era. This is inevitable, but at the same time every son of Oxford will hope and believe that no desire for economy or efficiency or popularity will drive her to sacrifice the thoroughness and

the humanity which were her glory before the war.

My thanks are due to the editors of the *North American Student*, the *Indiana University Alumni Quarterly*, the *Nation*, the *Atlantic Monthly*, the *Educational Review*, the *English Journal*, and to the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching for permission to reprint various essays. The exact date and place of publication of each is mentioned in the footnotes throughout the volume.

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BY THE SAME AUTHOR

ELIZABETHAN ROGUES AND VAGABONDS
COLLEGE ENGLISH
A MANUAL FOR THE STUDY OF ENGLISH
LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION
ENGLISH AND ENGINEERING

I

THE OXFORD STAMP¹

ONE of the finest things that has ever been written about Oxford is a paragraph in Matthew Arnold's *Culture and Anarchy*. In it Arnold comments on what is often called Oxford's ineffectiveness. He has his own theory as to the cause of this and he states forcibly his reason for believing that Oxford, the home of lost causes, and what Oxford stands for, are the salvation of English civilization. "Oxford, the Oxford of the past," says Arnold, "has many faults; and she has heavily paid for them in defeat, in isolation, in want of hold upon the modern world. Yet we in Oxford, brought up amidst the beauty and sweetness of that beautiful place, have not failed to seize one truth,—the truth that beauty and sweetness are essential characters of a complete human perfection. When I insist on this, I am all in the faith and tradition of Oxford.

¹ *North American Student*, June and November, 1916.

I say boldly that this our sentiment for beauty and sweetness, our sentiment against hideousness and rawness, has been at the bottom of our attachment to so many beaten causes, of our opposition to so many triumphant movements. And the sentiment is true, and has never been wholly defeated, and has shown its power even in its defeat. We have not won our political battles, we have not carried our main points, we have not stopped our adversaries' advance, we have not marched victoriously with the modern world; but we have told silently upon the mind of the country, we have prepared currents of feeling which sap our adversaries' position when it seems gained, we have kept up our own communications with the future."¹

Opinions may differ as to the value of Oxford training, but, whether Arnold be right or wrong, it is undeniable that (saving a few exceptions which prove the rule) Oxford does make an impression, and that a deep one, upon her sons. Her influence works in complex and subtle ways which defy complete analysis. Yet the Ameri-

¹ *Culture and Anarchy*, ch. i.

can student, fresh from his experience in an American university, especially if he be looking forward to becoming a university teacher on his return, can hardly resist attempting such an analysis if only for the sake of making himself more broadly useful to the institution he is to serve. I wish in this essay to point out two or three ways in which it has seemed to me that the life at Oxford stamps upon the men who live it this distinctive character. I shall not resist the temptation to compare Oxford life with that in an American university, and if the result is to show that Oxford utilizes for good certain social and intellectual activities which in our colleges tend either to go to waste or to produce harm, my aim will have been achieved.

I

In speaking of Oxford and indulging in this fascinating attempt to analyze the nature of her influence, one naturally thinks and speaks first of "Oxford life." It is her distinction, as it is that of all educational institutions worthy of the name, that she molds the life of her sons in her

own way, gives it her character and her impress. This is perhaps the truest measure of a university—the life which it creates, the way in which, under its influence, men translate thought into action.

It is difficult to characterize Oxford life in general terms. At the first glimpse it seems to be all eating and drinking and sports and talk. It is luxurious in a way that college life rarely is in America, but not pretentious in the way that American college life so often is. For example, the Oxford undergraduate dresses badly by preference: he delights in rough tweed Norfolk jackets, gray flannel bags (deserving of the name in that they are never pressed), and woolen shirts and soft collars. The cap is the universal head-gear on week-days and the pipe the well-nigh universal smoke. But the Oxford undergraduate would never glory in an expensive room, bare of furniture and books, as rich young Americans have been known to do. He is more likely to make rather a point of a good showing of books and prints on his walls, of a window-box filled with flowers in the spring, and of a

cheerful, hospitable atmosphere in his room generally, with a plentiful supply of tobacco on the mantel-piece and a well-stocked sideboard.

It is impossible to understand the cheerful, hospitable, home-like life of the Oxford college man without some understanding of the Oxford college system. The colleges bear the same relation to the University that our states do to the Nation: a man is a member of the University through his membership in a college. There are twenty-two colleges, varying in size from thirty to three hundred and fifty men; the average is about one hundred and fifty. Each college has its buildings (usually built around quadrangles), where the members live, and each college furnishes a certain amount of instruction. The lectures provided by any one college are open to all the members of the University. While a man is always under the care of a tutor in his own college, he has open to him all the instruction which the University provides, and consequently the choice of a college has more social than intellectual importance, although it is true, and especially so at Oxford, that a man's associates

have a good deal of influence on his work. The college is a sort of enlarged American fraternity, heavily endowed, engaging in the business of instruction and discipline, determining the life of the undergraduate in all its human and social aspects. There is a so-called Non-collegiate body which is to all intents and purposes another college, which however is not provided with buildings, and the members of which are bound together by much weaker social ties.

The American at Oxford is forcibly impressed by the fact that there is much more social life than he has been accustomed to in his native university. Oxford testifies to the value which she puts upon this social training by her requirement of residence. The tutors and undergraduates recognize it in their plans of work. The average honors man does only a small part of his work during term time. He attends lectures, accumulates references, maps out the ground to be covered, but reserves his hard grinding for the vacations.

In college the Oxford undergraduate has two rooms to himself—a large and usually comfort-

able study where he lives and works, and where he eats all his meals except dinner, and a small, not too comfortable bed-room, where he sleeps, and where in the morning he splashes himself in a tin hat-tub. The Oxford day begins early, with a splash in the before-mentioned tin tub at half-past seven, followed by chapel at eight (or roll-call at five minutes to), and breakfast at half-past eight. Breakfast is the great social meal in Oxford, the most popular occasion for entertaining friends and for being entertained. It is a solid comfortable meal, and after it the undergraduates are likely to sit and smoke and talk until well into the morning. After this there are newspapers (which Oxford men read with a diligence unknown to me among undergraduates anywhere else), and more genial company in the Junior Common Room, so that the man is lucky who finds time for one or two lectures, and perhaps an hour of work, between breakfast and lunch. This meal is only a snack; it is eaten at one, and by two all Oxford is out-of-doors in some variety of athletic costume, engaged in some of the many forms of out-door

sport. Tea follows at about half-past four; again there is an opportunity for interchange of hospitality, and again the time floats away in talk and smoke, so that some resolution is needed to get in an hour of reading before dinner. After dinner, which is eaten in the college hall,—black-gowned undergraduates at long tables down the middle and black-gowned Dons at the high table at one end,—there is another chance for the sociable man to entertain his friends at coffee in his rooms, and this event may prolong itself into an evening of bridge, or the company may separate to read an hour or two before turning in.

A very idle life this seems to most American Rhodes Scholars when they come in contact with it for the first time. One effect of American university training has been to give them the feeling that time spent in social life is more or less wasted. Often of course it is time wasted; but, under favorable conditions, it is time spent in the most valuable way possible. It offers Oxford men an opportunity of acquiring, in the numberless discussions which this social

life makes possible, an openness and alertness of mind, a certain independence in thinking, and a readiness, which it is almost impossible to acquire in any other way. Perhaps there is no teaching equal in value to good conversation; perhaps there is no form of teaching which American undergraduates need so much and of which they get so little, largely because of the external arrangements of our college life. Cardinal Newman discusses this subject in a passage in his *Idea of a University* which is illuminating to the man who is trying to understand the secret magic of Oxford and also to the man who is seeking to add all possible good things to our own educational system. "I protest to you, Gentlemen," Newman says, "that if I had to choose between a so-called University, which dispensed with residence and tutorial superintendence, and gave its degrees to any person who passed an examination in a wide range of subjects, and a University which had no professors or examinations at all, but merely brought a number of young men together for three or four years, and then sent them away as the University of

Oxford is said to have done some sixty years since,¹ if I were asked which of these two methods was the better discipline of the intellect,—mind, I do not say which is *morally* the better, for it is plain that compulsory study must be a good and idleness an intolerable mischief,—but if I must determine which of the two courses was the more successful in training, moulding, enlarging the mind, which sent out men the more fitted for their secular duties, which produced better public men, men of the world, men whose names would descend to posterity, I have no hesitation in giving the preference to that University which did nothing, over that which exacted of its members an acquaintance with every science under the sun. . . .

“When a multitude of young men, keen, open-hearted, sympathetic, and observant, as young men are, come together and freely mix with each other, they are sure to learn from one another, even if there be no one to teach them; the conversation of all is a series of lectures to each, and they gain for themselves new ideas and

¹ Newman was writing in 1852.

views, fresh matter of thought, and distinct principles for judging and acting, day by day. . . . That youthful community will constitute a whole, it will embody a specific idea, it will represent a doctrine, it will administer a code of conduct, and it will furnish principles of thought and action. It will give birth to a living teaching, which in course of time will take the shape of a self-perpetuating tradition, or a *genius loci*, as it is sometimes called; which haunts the home where it has been born, and which imbues and forms, more or less, and one by one, every individual who is successively brought under its shadow.”¹

Of course conversation and discussion will not supply intellect, or even information, where these do not exist; much of Oxford’s social life offers only social training, which however is of so fine a sort that it has come to be regarded in England as the distinguishing mark of a university man. But at its best, this intellectual discussion, freed from pedantry and self-consciousness by the leaven of healthy, enthusiastic,

¹ *Idea of a University*, vi, 9.

undergraduate life, is the one characteristic of Oxford that we of the American universities ought most to envy. It is made possible only by a very comfortable, even luxurious, college life, by the fact that men can afford time to study in vacation, by the fact that the University is broken up into small groups of men who live together in colleges—groups which are not too large for intimacy of acquaintance, and which are yet large enough to afford some choice of companions—and lastly, this freedom of discussion is made possible by the fact that English university men, for the most part, follow their course straight through from beginning to end, thus keeping up their college associations.

II

One feature of Oxford life, developed to its present importance since his time, Arnold would not have approved of—the emphasis on athletic sports. His admiration for “our young Barbarians all at play” was mingled with thinly disguised scorn; play to him was only play, or at the most, a service to the health of the body.

I have written in more detail about this subject in another essay and need only say here that to me the principal value of Oxford sport, as of all true sport, is not physical, but moral. No other activity tests the character of the youth as do his sports; when well conducted they demand and develop courage, honesty, generosity, manliness, perseverance, temperance, and obedience. No one expression sums up so many of the qualities that a boy ought to have as to say "he is a good sportsman." "No preacher," says Dean Briggs of Harvard, "and no dean can do what a football coach can do in maintaining among students a clean, brave, sensitively honorable life. The reason is simple, he works in a field that young men good or bad instinctively love, and his results are seen and felt by thousands. If he teaches his players (forbidden by rule to use the fist) the art of using the end of the forearm with the hand turned back, he degrades not only them, but the whole university, and such universities as are affected by his prestige; if he teaches his players to play hard and fearlessly, never inflicting a wanton injury,

never slugging on the sly, never insulting an opponent to make him slug and get disqualified, never playing anything but a 'white' game from start to finish, he lifts up the sportsmanship of his college and, in some measure, of his country. Clean sportsmanship, as everybody knows, means honorable manhood." This is the reason we ought to train our boys in athletics, not for the sake of the physical health primarily, valuable as that is, but for the sake of the moral good—sportsmanship—which is more valuable still. In Oxford, participation in sport is well-nigh universal, and the benefit is thus shared by all. No one (or almost no one) is left, as with us, to be spectator; everyone is playing. There is almost no gymnasium work; athletics at Oxford means games, out of doors, practically every day in the year. In contrast with this our American athletics are feverish and unhealthy. We make too much of a few athletes and deny all chance of participation to the rest of the students. So long as we leave for them nothing but the trivial rôle of spectator they will not understand the true meaning of sport, and just

so long will their demand for victory at any price tend to lower the standards of our games, as is the case in our college athletics to-day.

III

This outline will suggest to the reader roughly what it is that men mean when they speak of Oxford life. But social life does not engross all the interests of an Oxford man, though it occupies during term time the center of the stage. There is also work to be done at Oxford—work which, at its best, in the case of the honors man, is hard and thorough and independent to a degree which is rare with us. Oxford work is organized not by courses, but by examinations. In preparation for his final honor “schools,” as they are called, a man spends two years. He works constantly under the direction of a tutor, but at the same time he is thrown largely on his own resources. The whole system of teaching tends to that end. Tutorial instruction means anything but molly-coddling. It means that the undergraduate must bring to a focus a whole week’s reading in a single essay which he dis-

cusses with his tutor at their meeting. The planning of this work is left to him: there are few "assignments" in our sense of the word. The tutor usually fixes the topic, but the choice of books to be read, of how much or how little shall be done, of the point of view from which the topic shall be treated—all these are left to the student. He may follow his own bent, may scant one subject and go to the bottom of another, finish a task or leave the greater part of it for the vacation, with only the mildest protest or praise from his tutor.

An undergraduate does not work for his tutor—he works for himself. He will be examined, not by the men who have taught him, but by strangers—possibly men from another university. A man's standing, it may be his whole future, depends on the result of his examinations: his duty is to prepare himself for that test. The difference between such work and that of an American university is best expressed by the comment repeated by generations of Rhodes Scholars, "In an American university a man takes courses; at Oxford he studies a subject."

The greater part of this work most Oxford men do in the vacations, which extend over half the year, six weeks at Christmas, six at Easter, and four months in the summer. The term is the time for blocking out what is to be done, for accumulating books and references, for hearing lectures, and for living the Oxford life: the vacation is the time for solid reading and thought.

Americans who go in for research at Oxford are confused by the lack of "organization" of graduate work. They find that they are expected to know themselves what they want to do and how. Oxford opens to them her treasures of men and lectures and books, but they must choose for themselves. Advice on specific points may be had for the asking: the amount of individual attention they may get from men, each of whom is an authority in his line, is almost unlimited. But no one is ready to shoulder the responsibility for the student's work; no one is ready to say, follow this plan and your study will be a success: all that is left to him.¹

The unity, independence, and thoroughness of

¹ This was written before the institution at Oxford of the Ph.D. degree.

such work give the Oxford discipline its distinctive character so far as studies are concerned. The Oxford student is an individual, working out his own salvation. His relation to his tutor is that of man to man; his mastery of his subject is his own, not something which he has learned up, in common with a body of classmates, from some lecturer who has mastered it and who has authority to say what will be "required" on examination. The limitations of such a plan are that it is expensive to put into practice, that relatively less ground can be covered, that the irresponsible individual is likely to do very little, and that there is no means of compensating for the cruel injustices which the examinations occasionally work on the best of men.

But the judgment of Americans who are familiar with this system as well as our own is that the advantages of the Oxford method of training far outweigh its disadvantages. By this method at its best, one gets the reality of education and that is something to be held above price by men who have been through and are

destined to administer a system like our own, so likely to become mechanical and artificial and unreal in its results. It is not surprising therefore that in a number of American colleges and universities various features of the Oxford system are now being tried: the tutorial system at Princeton, the pass and honor system at Harvard, Columbia, Yale, Oberlin, and Minnesota, and a combination of the two at the University of Washington.

IV

In a sense this is a glorified picture of Oxford. It is an attempt to express not what she gives to every man, but what she gives to the man who is prepared to receive it. It is her best that we Americans should strive to understand and to appropriate. No sensible person would deem it possible or advisable to duplicate an English university in America, but some things we should do well, if it were possible, to learn from them. One is to make our social life an interchange of ideas, and thus to give it an intellectual value which it often has not at present. Another is to make our athletics really sportsmanlike and to

make them universal, which means to make them one of the most powerful moral forces in our student world. A third, and most important of all, is so to alter the administration of our courses as to put more emphasis upon individual effort, to make our programmes less pretentious and more thorough, to force our undergraduates to study subjects rather than merely to take courses, to lay emphasis upon thought rather than upon information, which is, after all, the secret of education.

This is the beauty and sweetness of Oxford as at least one American Rhodes Scholar has seen it. It is education of course in a wonderful setting, rich in the memories and beautiful in the building of centuries that have passed away. However, the deepest impression which Oxford makes upon her sons comes not from her age, nor from the beauty of her parks and towers and quadrangles, but from the living force of her educational ideals; it is her realization of these ideals which, in an age of shifting educational standards and amid kaleidoscopic changes in educational methods, will keep up Oxford's

“communications with the future”—her realization of them in a life which is luxurious without being soft, and in a discipline which is thorough without losing its humanity.

II

SPECTATORS AND SPORT ¹

I

THE feeling of American college professors towards intercollegiate athletics is one of growing hostility. On every hand one hears more and more talk of the necessity of their abolition, if our institutions of learning do not wish to lose their standards of scholarship and their moral prestige. The candid observer, however strong his love for intercollegiate athletics may be, and however high his estimate of their value, must realize that this hostility is to a large extent justified. There is no use in denying that a growing antagonism exists between those forces in our universities which stand for work and those which stand for athletics. Most universities require a certain proficiency in scholarship of all athletes who play on any of the teams.

¹ *Indiana University Alumni Quarterly*, April, 1915.

The enforcement of this requirement generates constant friction and is the cause of endless deceptions and evasions. Apparently a great many of our athletes come to college not to study, but to play, or, if that is not the case, the enormous demand of such a sport as football on their time and energy makes it difficult for the best of them to achieve any creditable showing in their studies, at any rate during the football season. A great many college teachers are wondering whether, in President Wilson's phrase, the side shows are not crowding out the main performance.

If that were the whole of the story, conditions would not be so bad. The remedy would lie merely in increasing the severity of the restrictions governing the right of the men to play. Football would become a sport for only the few exceptional men who could stand the strain of playing and of work at the same time. But as a matter of fact that is not the end of the story. The forces behind athletics are too strong to be thwarted by petty faculty restrictions. Our athletic organizations look sometimes like great

machines for evading faculty rules. By a million subterfuges and devices athletes and their sponsors dodge the requirements or satisfy them in irregular ways. By special tutoring, by judicious selection of snap courses, by making up work in summer schools, and in some cases by bringing to bear undue influence on members of the teaching staff, our athletes are dragged through the requisite number of hours and the accounts kept barely square. Conditions are worse in some colleges and universities than in others: at the worst we have plain corruption and deceit; at the best we have what is still a travesty of the university ideal.

Another aspect of the situation, equally irritating and disgusting to many men, is the operation of the complex system of forces by which athletes are induced to enter one college or another. In these days college coaches and alumni keep a sharp watch on the preparatory schools. Old athletes attend "prep" school games, assist in coaching, officiate at meets, and cultivate the acquaintance of promising boys with the view of securing them eventually for one institution

or another. A player who shows remarkable ability in football, baseball, or track athletics is a marked man henceforth. He is wooed by the alumni and other representatives of rival colleges. If he is poor, he is offered pecuniary assistance in a thousand forms. Perhaps a rich alumnus will offer to finance him outright for the four years of his college course. Or he is offered a scholarship, or an easy job by which he can make his way. He is made to feel that the college wants him. If he is a knowing fellow he will play off one institution against another to get the best berth possible for himself. In its beginnings there is nothing unfair or underhanded about this system, but the final result of it is the maxim, believed in and acted on in scores of American colleges: "If you want good athletes, you must go out and get them." The danger in this state of affairs lies precisely in the fact that it is so difficult to draw the line between good and evil. There is no reason why a man should not urge a young athlete to go to his college and no reason why he should not help the boy financially, provided the young

athlete wants an education. But too often educational interests are lost sight of in enthusiasm for athletics, and the athlete in question becomes not a student, but a hired player. The alumni are the effective missionaries for this kind of work and they find themselves often, led by unthinking loyalty and college spirit, acting as cogs in a machine which tends to make professionals of our athletes.

The problem of professional *versus* amateur standards is a serious one in American athletics. There is all over the country an open market for athletic skill, especially in baseball. It is hard for the poor boy to see why he should not earn money in the summer by his ability in baseball, especially if he is skilful enough to earn in this way many times more than he could in any other occupation. When he goes to college, it is a bitter disappointment to find himself ineligible because he has taken money for playing in the past. Hence the endless difficulties connected with summer baseball. The college athlete is nearly always required to give his word of honor that he has never used his athletic skill

for gain, and he nearly always does so. A man otherwise truthful and honest will not scruple to lie in this regard, and he would probably lose caste with his fellows if he did.

The conditions surrounding the eligibility of our athletes have their counterpart in our methods of playing the games. The standards of our national sport are so well known that we have lost the sense of their moral nature. The baseball player who did not deceive the umpire if he could would be hooted by the crowd as a fool. We have developed a marvelously ingenious set of rules to guard against unfair play, and, by procuring old players for umpires, we have so arranged matters that in the best games only the most skilful violations of the rules can be made safely. But we have no idea of any obligation on the part of the player to observe the rules as a matter of honor; the game is to do all you can to violate them without being caught. The crowd admires the runner who can cut a base and "get away with it." The batter always acts as if the ball had not gone over the plate, the catcher as if it had. The runner always moves as if he

had not been touched, the baseman as if he had touched him. The game is played not merely between the two teams, but also between each team and the umpire.

The same code of ethics holds in football. The regulations against holding, off-side, and unnecessary roughness are very complicated and strict; the ingenuity of coaches and players is taxed to obtain the benefit of a violation of them without being caught. No self-respecting coach would avow this, but this is usually the fact. Usually, but not quite always, a small minority of coaches teach their men to play the game scrupulously, but their work is nullified by the unfair tactics of opposing teams, which their own men must resist. As in baseball, so in football, the player would be considered a fool who plainly admitted in the case of a disputed decision that he had been off-side or had held his opponent unfairly in the line.

In all these ways, in regard to the eligibility of players and their methods of playing the games, we have developed in intercollegiate athletics a code of ethics which at their best are

shady and at their worst plainly corrupt. The picture here drawn is carefully restrained: in many instances conditions are worse; in very few are they better.

II

Under the circumstances the agitation to abolish intercollegiate athletics is not surprising. Before proceeding, however, to the heroic remedy of amputation, it seems worth while to consider a little more carefully the causes of the disease. Is it that we Americans are by nature an unsportsmanlike people, shrewd, grasping, unfair, incapable of playing a gentleman's game? Or is there something in the nature of our intercollegiate athletics to corrupt an otherwise square-minded nation? The answer is *No* to the first question, and *Yes* to the second. We are not a perfect people by any means, but we have not sunk below the level of honest sport. The proof is that we have it, though not enough of it. In our intercollegiate athletics there is one important element which has always ruined sport wherever it has been present, and is to-day

ruining ours: that element is the spectator.

Games run for the benefit of the spectators always degenerate morally, for the reason that the spectator is irresponsible morally and demands that his team win at any cost. Professional baseball is of course the great example. As played to-day, the game owes all the value which it has as a sport to the heroic resistance of sportsmanlike players against the unsportsmanlike tendencies of the crowd. The players have not entirely lost the battle, but they have been beaten back; and the game, wherever played, has suffered in consequence. The professional baseball player is hired to win, and he would lose his job if he did not do everything toward that end which the umpire will allow. As it is, he is not as bad as the crowd, and he does not do all the crowd demands. If he did the mortality among umpires would be largely increased and the game would degenerate daily into physical combat. He is not as bad as the crowd would like him to be, but he must be very strong-minded to play as clean a game as his own best instincts require.

Games which are not run for the benefit of spectators naturally tend, in civilized nations, to be clean, because sport itself is a great moral educator. Tennis in our own country is a good example. It is not a spectators' game, and consequently it is often played without an umpire, each player relying on his opponent to give the decisions on his own side of the court. The keenness of the rivalry does not cause it to degenerate. It is just as sportsmanlike a game in intercollegiate matches or international tournaments as when played between two individuals in a small town. The story is well known of a player in one of our international tournaments a few years ago who, when the umpire made a wrong decision in his favor, objected to it. When the umpire refused to change his decision on the ground that the rules forbade it, the player immediately served a double fault to even up the score.

In striking contrast is the attitude of a crowd cheering its team at a football game. The fundamental notion of the spectators helping their team to win, and confusing their opponents, by

cheering is unsportsmanlike. And the methods by which it is done are more unsportsmanlike still. It has not been long since it was the common custom to keep up a continuous din when the opposing team had the ball in order to prevent the players from hearing their captain's signals. Native human decency has changed that habit in most parts of the country. But a crowd will still cheer when their opponents are penalized and still hoot the officials when the penalty falls on their side. It is still a difficult task for the leaders to keep college cheering within the bounds of decency.

III

The cause of this unsportsmanlike attitude and the bad influence of the crowd is easy to understand. The spectators are bad sportsmen because most of them have not been trained in sport. The great value of sport is not physical, but moral. It teaches a man—or a woman—that he—or she—should play the game squarely, that it is better to lose a gentleman's game than to win a mucker's. It teaches respect and ad-

miration for good play on the other side; it teaches self-control and decency, for only by the exercise of these, to some degree at least, can it exist. It is easy to understand theoretically the admirable nature of these qualities, but it is a hard thing to put them into action in the excitement of the game, when one is striving with all one's might to win. It is hard to make them a habit, hard never to lose control of oneself and let the natural savage take possession. The great value of sport is to develop these qualities, and to give men the habit of them in intense situations. The value of intercollegiate matches is that they add intensity to the situation by pitting the best players of one group against the best of another.

Now the qualities that I have just been speaking of the crowd does not feel, especially does not feel in moments of excitement. They are not merely ignorant of what is going on in the game, of the fine points of the play: they seem not to know the meaning of sport. Their one desire is to win—at any cost. The moral gap between player and spectator is one of the most curious

phenomena of our athletics. Every player has felt, perhaps half-unconsciously, the sensation of something like contempt for the "howling host," contrasting his own self-control with their delirious madness, realizing that they understand truly the meaning of nothing that they see except the figures on the score board.

The inferiority of the spectators is largely a matter of training. They want to win at any price because winning or losing is the only meaning the game has for them. And by the mesmeric force of their numbers and the sweetness of their praise they communicate their point of view to the players, so that the game becomes for these also a question only of winning or losing. Then it is that we have unfair play, with all the train of evils I have been enumerating. With our eyes fixed solely on winning, we use every means to secure good athletes, to evade the rules of scholarship or of amateur standing which might keep them out of the game, and, once they are in, we drive them to use every means, fair or foul, to win. We have made the crowd supreme in our athletics, taught the

players that they are to consider themselves its servants, and we have our games in the condition that they are to-day as the result.

IV

The problem of cleansing athletic sports is the problem either of getting rid of the spectators or of educating them morally by training them in sport. The latter is the better thing to do. It is not easy, but it is worth the doing, not merely in order to clean up our intercollegiate athletics, but in order to supply the moral lack of which the present state of our intercollegiate athletics is only a symptom. The tonic effects of such education would be of inestimable value in the life of the whole nation.

But it is well to face the difficulties of educating our college students in sport. Not a college or university in the country has the facilities to do it at present. We have not the playing fields, have not the time, have not the money. Sport is essentially aristocratic in that it demands these three things. It is a luxury, but of all luxuries perhaps the one which pays the

best returns, and appeals to the best natures. In order to educate all our undergraduates in sport we should have to multiply our facilities, not by two nor by five, but by ten and by twenty. A university with two thousand students would need twenty playing fields perhaps instead of one, with an appropriate number of tennis courts, basketball floors, swimming pools, skating rinks, and so on. Gymnasiums would not have to be multiplied in the same way. For what we need is not exercise and apparatus, but games. It is important not to confuse the two. Gymnastic exercises are well enough for medical purposes, for correcting physical defects, and for developing the weak. But they do not offer the fun and the moral tonic of games.

Such an athletic regeneration could not be accomplished by the colleges and universities alone. We should have to begin with the high schools, to endow them liberally with playing fields, provide men to teach and superintend the games, and probably to make games compulsory for all boys and girls who are physically fit. In other words we should have to turn the en-

tire student bodies of our high schools and colleges out to play.

This is the true remedy for our tainted athletics. We suffer not from too much play, but from too little. When all our students are trained in sport, most of them will be sportsmen. They will probably attend intercollegiate matches in smaller numbers. Many of them will be playing elsewhere themselves. But when they do attend, their attitude will be different,—more responsible, more critical, more moral. They will demand of the teams that represent them not victory at any price, but good sport; and the umpires will have an easier time and the problem of corrupt athletics will vanish.

Abolition of intercollegiate athletics is a poor remedy compared with this. The essence of sport is intensity. The best player of one group is always eager to match himself against the best of another—between colleges, between districts of the country, and between nations. To limit sport to the bounds of one institution is to castrate it, to take away from it all that gives fire and steam, to injure it even for the man who

could never hope to represent his university, to forfeit the opportunity of bringing out its highest values.

V

It can be objected against the plan here sketched for the renovation of our athletics that it would be difficult and costly to carry out. But it can hardly be maintained that it would not work. The proof that it will work is that it is working in England to-day. In the English public schools outdoor games are compulsory, and one of the most important duties of the master is to teach his boys to be sportsmen. The traditions of sport form one of the greatest moral contributions of the school to the boy's education. At the universities the same programme is followed. Games are no longer compulsory, but they are kept up. The small colleges into which Oxford and Cambridge are divided (averaging from one hundred to two hundred men) maintain, each one, a Rugby fifteen, a "soccer" eleven, one or two eights, a tennis six, and perhaps teams in hockey and track athletics. Everyone who can do anything

must bear his part. No one is left to be spectator, and college matches have no gate fees and no grand stands. What coaching there is, is done mostly by the captains and older players. Graduates return now and then to help with the Varsity teams. Men buy their suits and outfits; sometimes they pay their own expenses on trips. Organized cheering as we have it is unknown, and there is almost no need for eligibility rules. In the place of our complicated organization for coaching and for "rooting," there is sport for its own sake—clean, healthy, and well-nigh universal.

There is no essentially good feature of that system which we could not reproduce, if once we realized that the remedy for our athletic troubles is to train our undergraduates in sport. With the growing feeling against intercollegiate athletics in this country, it looks as if the first step we are likely to take will be their abolition. But in the opinion of the writer, that would be unnecessary and wrong. What we need at present is not restriction, but expansion. The most important thing is to provide our high schools

and colleges with playgrounds. Given these, everything else will follow. We could not of course reproduce all the details of the English system in this country. Some of its defects it is to be hoped we should miss in working out a plan of our own. But some system of general sport we should have for the sake of the moral good which the youth of the nation would get from it. That is the important thing. As a mere incident to that good, we should take away from our intercollegiate athletics their present character of gladiatorial combats, their spirit of win-at-any-price, and their tendency to corruption.

III

THE RELIGION OF PUNCH ¹

IT has for some years been evident to such persons as have had the curiosity to inquire about the matter that there is in the minds of many American college boys, and many college professors who are their advisers, a vague, intangible prejudice against the Rhodes Scholarships. This prejudice is not caused by the requirement of Greek. It is not a mere jingoistic objection to having anything to do with other than American universities. It is not due to the popular superstition that England is "behind the times" and hence as good as dead. Nor is it a result of the very wide-spread and very dense popular ignorance of what the scheme stands for, what are the conditions of obtaining an appointment, and what are the opportunities which an appointment opens.

The particular objection to which I allude is

¹ *Nation*, May 6, 1915.

different from all these, founded much deeper in our national feeling, and much less frequently voiced in plain words. It is an objection based partly on observation of the Americans who have returned from Oxford. It represents a shrewd analysis of the effect which Oxford has had on them: it rests on a fact, but a fact misunderstood.

Perhaps the clearest statement of this objection is to be found in the verdict of a keen, emphatic, hard-driving, Middle-Western educator on an ex-Rhodes Scholar who was a candidate for a position in his educational institution: "He's a gentleman, he is a good scholar, and not afraid of work, but *he has lost his punch! Oxford has tamed him!*" There it is—roughly but adequately put! In the opinion of a certain class of American educators the effect of Oxford on American boys has been to tame them. They come back, say these men, well trained, possibly more thoroughly grounded in the fundamentals of their subjects than they would have been in America. They are pleasant fellows socially, they have plenty of energy, and are ready to do

hard work, they are not Anglo-maniacs, they have no intention of trying to make America over on the English pattern (our objectors would take perhaps more joy in them and be less suspicious if they had), but they have lost that indefinable American characteristic known as *punch*.

I

What is this quality which we so admire and for which we have no other name than the slang word *punch*? It is a quality which can be known truly only by its works, and they are mighty and innumerable. It is the ability to achieve the end without the means, the whole without the parts. It makes railways without money, churches without religion, literature without art, newspapers without news, and educational institutions without educated men. It is not, however, to be confused with *bluff*. It is not the quality which wins poker games without cards. It is *bluff* raised to a higher power; it survives "calling"—at least for a generation. The next generation pays, as in the case of the site of the Panama Canal.

Admiration for punch is not confined to the Western Hemisphere. All Europeans admire this quality (though they will not always admit the fact) in our conduct of business. Englishmen who have spent a good part of their lives in the colonies admire it more than those who have stayed at home. And these are precisely the Englishmen with whom Americans are most comfortable. But the distinctive feature of American punch is that we do not confine its range to the world of business and practical life, but are beginning to extend it to the intellectual and spiritual world as well. A new type of college professor, a new type of preacher and lecturer and teacher is appearing among us—the man with punch.

Our fathers, so far as we of this generation can make out, did not know this man. In their churches and universities he would perhaps not have been tolerated; there are some places where he is not tolerated to-day. But he is extending his domains. The trend of the times is in his favor. This is an age of experiment in education. We no longer have the majority of our

students taking a "classical" course, the subject-matter of which is more or less standard and fixed. We have very few "courses" to-day; under the elective system each student makes his own. In education at present we are engaged ✓ in trying all things. It looks sometimes as if, like the lady in *Piers Plowman*, we had forgotten to turn over the leaf and learn that we must hold fast to that which is good.

The great difference between the education of ✓ the present and that of a few generations ago is not that we have substituted science and the modern languages for the classics. Nor is it that we have largely substituted bread-and-butter values for cultural. It is that in place of a standard and regular discipline we have now the tacit theory of the educational equality of all subjects and the anarchy of the elective system. The result is that our work is tentative and ineffective; our very degrees have lost their old meaning and acquired no new; the word education is one of the vaguest in our language. It does not follow that we are educationally on the road to perdition. More likely the reverse. Ex- ✓

periment and tentative efforts are the price of progress, and it is only by this means that a new educational discipline can be evolved, summing up the lessons of a longer past and meeting the needs of a more complex future.

But meanwhile, in the confusion, has come the opportunity of the man with punch. Lured by the magnitude of our educational system, he has invaded this field as he might have invaded South America or the Orient in business, using the same "practical" methods, and insisting on the same immediate results. He has not been admitted everywhere, but he has been admitted and applauded too much. As a result of his efforts, our universities are organized for "efficiency," and "scientific management" threatens to tell men how to teach classes as well as how to lay bricks or load bars of pig iron on a car. Our university presidents tend to become captains of industry, and athletic sports tend to justify themselves not as sport, but as advertising.

The man with punch has commercialized education and advertised it, and in some cases

well-nigh destroyed it. For the rough-and-ready methods, the impatience, the liking for show, the hasty contempt for thoroughness, the disregard of preparation and of finish, which are elements of a certain kind of machine-made success in the practical sphere, are handicaps in the world of intellect. A man with punch may be made into a philosopher, but in the process he will lose part of his admiration for punch. For punch is not so much the faculty of getting results as of getting the appearance of them. It is at bottom the talent for publicity, expressing itself always in "grand-stand play." Flashiness, show, advertising—all these qualities which it loves—are attributes of charlatanism in the intellectual world. And if the intellectual life means anything at all, it means never-ending opposition to charlatanism. Charlatanism is not only inimical to it, it is a complete and total negation of it. "Sainte-Beuve relates," says Arnold, "that Napoleon once said, when somebody was spoken of in his presence as a charlatan: 'Charlatan as much as you please; but where is there *not* charlatanism?' 'Yes,' answers Sainte-Beuve, 'in

politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance; herein lies the inviolableness of that noble portion of man's being.' "

It may be that we shall find one day that charlatanism is not all a good in practical life, that it is worth while to have our clothing all wool as well as prominently advertised, our food pure as well as packed in fancy boxes. If we ever learn that, we shall probably learn it when our universities learn it, when they acquire more respect for thoroughness, when they promise less and perform more, when we teach our students the difference between really knowing a thing and half-knowing it, when we distinguish between shoddy work in the intellectual sphere and sound.

II

That is the lesson which Oxford is teaching our American boys. They take various courses, the things they learn have various degrees of "practical" value, or perhaps no practical value

at all. But when they return they are all firmly impressed with one thing: the necessity for thoroughness in intellectual work, the difference between knowledge and smatterings. And the inevitable effect of this is to sober them, to make them less disposed to pretend to know what they do not know, to make them settle down rather quietly and seriously to the work which they wish to do (or can find to do) at home.

It must be repeated that the writer is under no delusion that ex-Rhodes Scholars are the only Americans who do this. Our own universities have many hard-working, sound scholars and clear thinkers—men who spend their time in work and not in advertising. But too often they are not the men with the widest influence, or the largest salaries, or the greatest reputations. Among the students whom they send out are many more of the same sort. Only they are not always the most loudly heralded of our graduates. And with the Rhodes Scholars there is likely to be one curious difference. Appointments to Oxford are made entirely by American committees. The qualifying examination (notwith-

standing the many failures to pass it) is very elementary, testifying to a certain very small acquaintance with Latin and Greek, arithmetic, and algebra. Any man who has had a little classics can pass it, and a man with punch can pass it with almost no classics at all. Now, the man with punch is just the man who will not fear to attempt it, and he is also the man whom the committee of selection in his native state is likely to admire and to appoint to the scholarship. Nor is there anything to lament in this fact; punch is not so much a vice as a dangerous virtue; our young American may be the better for it, though perhaps not the more comfortable in Oxford at first. In Oxford he meets something new in his experience, something which he learns slowly to understand, and not merely to understand but to love. He is met by an attitude at once hospitable and critical—a democracy where men are known intimately and personally by one another and by their teachers, where ideas count as ideas, and character as character, where good intentions are not allowed to pass for knowledge, nor a ready

memory for power of thought. There are shams in Oxford, it is true, but the spirit of the place is against them. Honesty and thoroughness are the most important characteristics of its intellectual life. The beauty of Oxford is built upon them, as all real beauty is. There are gigantic stupidities in Oxford, and in the men who rule Oxford from without, but there is also that in the spirit of the place which will dissolve them and conquer them and take away from them their power. Reforms in Oxford are slow, but they are always coming, and when they come they are not stupid reforms, sweeping away good and evil together to set up new good and evil in their place. Oxford has the patience to gather up the best of her traditions into her new self, year by year and century by century, as she carefully preserves the best of her old buildings in her unceasing reconstructions.

Into this atmosphere and into this life comes our young American with his punch. He is not a bad man for Oxford on the whole; as I have said, he may be the better for his punch, and he will be better still when he returns from Oxford

with his faith in punch shaken and a belief in quiet thoroughness in its place. But in his case the change is very evident, and our emphatic Middle-Western educator, instead of seeing the improvement, thinks his young protégé has been ruined by the experience.

Other Americans will not find him ruined, but the reverse. They will find him an ally in the battle which thoroughness is waging and must wage against charlatanism in our education and in our national life. The forces of thoroughness would have won the battle in this country without the aid of the Rhodes Scholarships. The evidence of their progress can be read more clearly every year. Our popular belief in method at the expense of knowledge, our worship of form at the expense of substance, our faith in administrative machinery at the expense of thought—all these elements of our intellectual life are doomed by forces that we have the power to generate and are generating ourselves. But in this battle, Oxford, by means of the Rhodes Scholarships, is furnishing a little band of recruits whose influence, never urged by organiza-

tion or machinery, but quietly by individual thought and effort, will be felt more and more as the years go on, against the operation in our intellectual life of the American ideal of *punch*.

IV

A CHALLENGE TO RHODES SCHOLARS ¹

THE American Rhodes Scholars have been a much inspected and much criticized group of men. Not that they have been over-much in the public eye, for they have not. The American people has remained for the most part unconscious of their existence, but whenever, on exceptional occasions, they have been dragged out of their accustomed obscurity into the light, it has been for the purpose of criticism, usually of an unfavorable kind.

At first the matter of scholarship was one of the favorite topics of criticism, English and American. Our men have been by no means universally successful in getting "Firsts" or even "Seconds" in their final examinations for the Oxford degree; it was felt, with some justification, that Rhodes Scholars were picked men

¹ An editorial in the *American Oxonian*, January, 1917, revised and expanded.

and that it reflected no great credit on American university standards for them to fail of distinction in Oxford. Upon these American university standards English critics were not slow to place the blame, and the superficiality and the tendency to smatterings inherent in the American system were widely talked about.

The very virtues which secured men their appointments have been made a matter of reproach against them. By the terms of the Rhodes Will one qualification to be taken into account in the selection of Rhodes Scholars is "interest and proficiency in outdoor sports." More weight may have been given to this requirement occasionally than was intended by the Founder. At any rate, the Rhodes Scholars have been frequently attacked as star athletes and nothing more. Rules have been passed at Oxford limiting their participation in track athletics—the one Oxford sport for which American athletic experience is of much value.

The fourfold requirement of the Rhodes Will, taking account of scholarship, character, athletic experience, and "instincts for leadership,"

was a novel one. The ideal Rhodes Scholar is, of course, the man who is first rate in all these respects. But wanting that, in places where competition is not keen, the question arises whether it is better to choose men who are second or third rate in all respects, rather than men who are first rate in one and negligible in the others. Probably nine-tenths of the men who have been at Oxford would prefer that primary importance be given to the matter of scholarship in the selection of the candidate, and the second place to personality, but it may be doubted whether American committees of selection are so fully impressed with these ideas. The scholastic record of the Rhodes Scholars at Oxford is not one to be ashamed of, but it is not as good as one may hope it will be in the future.

Another criticism has been made lately by newspapers in various parts of the United States which comes home far more directly to the central purpose of the Rhodes foundation. Apropos of the abolition of the German scholarships, the question has been asked: Have the scholarships in any country, and especially in America, ful-

filled the purpose of the Founder? Has the presence of three or four hundred Oxford men in the United States done anything to better relations between America and England? Can their influence, in however slight degree, be traced in any movement to bring about international peace and good-will? The writers in question have seen none, and have not hesitated, in the summary manner of newspaper men, to pronounce the Rhodes scheme a failure.

Whether this conclusion be justified or not, there is no doubt that the challenge is. The Rhodes Scholarships are not merely a means of helping men to careers and to individual success. They were planned with a wider motive, and confer upon their holders a wider responsibility. Rhodes aimed at nothing less than the creation of international understanding as a basis for friendship and good-will, which should result in peace between nations.

Since this challenge was made, our international relations have changed. Russia has become a republic, Germany has adopted unrestricted submarine warfare, and we have joined

the Allies in the war against her. With all these events the Rhodes Scholars have had, of course, simply nothing to do, but the situation which results is such as to add immensely to the importance of Rhodes's scheme. For the first time in history the Anglo-Saxon nations of the world are united. Their union has been brought about not so much by the desires of idealists to lay a foundation for world peace, as by the stupid blunders of a common foe. It will depend upon quieter and more intelligent forces to ensure that after the war this union will be continued, will become some kind of league to enforce for all time the rights of small states, and to uphold the cause of justice and peace between larger ones.

The hour is big with possibilities: some kind of scheme for ensuring the peace of the world seems immeasurably nearer than ever before. But the cause of peace depends in the long run not merely upon machinery, but upon international understanding and good-will, upon educational influences. Rhodes's scheme, the largest international educational experiment in history,

may be destined to play as the years go on no small part in the inauguration of a new era. America has never done, perhaps never could have done, so great a service to the cause of peace as she is doing in entering the war. But entering the war is only the beginning. After it has been fought to a successful conclusion there will yet remain the greatest part of the work to do. Even after the league to enforce peace, which we all dream of and hope for, has become a reality, there will yet remain the difficult task of living up to it day by day, and year by year. Men must learn to think of international relations in new terms, must learn to forego many selfish national ambitions, must learn to think of other nations far more intelligently, and with far more affection than at present. To this end nothing will be so much needed as understanding. Good-will, of a vague, sentimental kind, will not be lacking in all nations, but to be productive of good, it must be made intelligent. That is where the value of such schemes as the Rhodes Scholarships will come in. There will be room for many more,

and it is to be hoped that we shall have them. One possibility that presents itself is that we should use some part of the repayment of the loan we are now making to the Allies to establish reciprocal scholarships, bringing young men from all those countries to study in American universities as Americans now go to England.

But the old question returns: Have these educational schemes any practical effect? Can any results be predicted of the Rhodes Scholarships so far? There is little that can be pointed to in achievement. That must be admitted. Is there any promise? I think that it can be said without exaggeration that there is. But before going on to analyze those elements of the situation, every true friend of the scheme will wish to emphasize the challenge rather than the defense. The most serious charge that can be brought against us—the four hundred Americans who have during the last dozen years enjoyed the benefits of the Rhodes Scholarships, and those American college professors who have on the whole shown so little interest in the scheme—is that we have not yet succeeded in

making the scholarships a working success from the point of view of the number or the quality of the men who go in for them. In 1917, in six of the states that had the right of election, there were no candidates for the qualifying examination, and in two more no candidates passed. In state after state each year the number of candidates is so small that the appointments go by default to men who are not fitted to hold them.

The men who do go over, it is pretty well agreed in Oxford, by American scholars and English tutors alike, may be divided roughly into three classes. One third are first-rate—as good as could be expected; another third, while not brilliant, are satisfactory, and by their personal qualities well fitted to represent this country abroad; while the last third are not the kind to be a credit either to the states which sent them or to Oxford. The committees that elected them were compelled to give the appointment to the best of the indifferent men who offered themselves. When all allowance is made for the novelty of the scheme, the unusual qualifications demanded, and the ignorance of Oxford

on the part of American boys and their teachers, the fact remains that we have not yet as a nation taken the interest that might have been expected in what is one of the greatest educational opportunities of modern times.

The competition for the Rhodes Scholarships and the interest in them in America have been disgracefully small and the responsibility for that fact must fall, first of all, upon the Rhodes Scholars who have returned; and, second, upon American college professors. The ultimate success or failure of the scheme lies in their hands. They are the only persons who can effectively portray its advantages and opportunities to American college boys, and they are the only persons who can influence the right men to go to Oxford.

Meanwhile what has been the contribution of the returned Rhodes Scholars to American life? Is there any sign that these men have a peculiar contribution to make as a result of their exceptional opportunities? In one line at least, it is perhaps not too early to point to what seem to be definite results: that is in education. In a

large number of the colleges and universities of the country—notably in Princeton, Columbia, Yale, Harvard, Oberlin, University of Minnesota, and the University of Washington—attempts are being made to apply English methods to the solution of American educational problems. The series of articles describing these attempts published in the Rhodes Scholars' magazine,—*The American Oxonian*—during the last two years show that they constitute a well-defined and important educational movement. The tutorial system of instruction, used in some places in America for a long time, is now being employed on a much wider scale. It would be hard to find a greater advance in methods of instruction than this. The tutorial system demands that the instructor do more than merely pour out a stream of facts and ideas over the heads of the class, or that he examine them over certain assigned reading; it demands instead, that he place the emphasis upon the individual reaction to the work, and it provides opportunities for personal teaching which has illumination and driving power many times as great as any-

thing which the instructor can do in the classroom or lecture alone.

The Oxford distinction between "pass" and "honor" degrees, making separate requirements and examinations for those men who wish to take a degree without distinction, and those who wish to take it with honors, is also being adopted in a large number of places. For the degree with honors many institutions are breaking away from the old theory which made the requirement for the A. B. simply the addition of a prescribed number of separate courses, and are giving some kind of comprehensive examination which shall test the candidate's grasp of his subject as a whole, his power of fitting together the various parts which he has studied separately, his grasp not only of minute facts, but also of larger relations.

All these changes mean, in the end, a less pretentious programme of study and a more thorough individual accomplishment. They mean shifting the emphasis, in undergraduate instruction, from what the professor has said to what the student has grasped. They mean

the change from a quantitative to a qualitative theory of culture. One ought to be on one's guard doubtless in these days against blaming German influence for what seems bad in any field of human endeavor, and attributing whatever seems good to the influence of England or France. But it can hardly be called yielding to this temptation to say that our undergraduate instruction in this country has in the past been modeled too much on the instruction given in German universities, which are, of course, graduate schools. It is perhaps not so much that the German methods are bad in their place as that we have misapplied them, and tried to use a procedure, well enough adapted to the needs of graduate students, for our undergraduates, who were ill prepared to profit by it.

Now ex-Rhodes Scholars can by no means claim all the credit for this extensive adaptation of English methods to American university conditions. In many colleges and universities the change was beginning before the advent of the first Rhodes men. In comparatively few places have Rhodes Scholars been leaders in the

movement, though in some few institutions they have. But in practically every instance, they will be found to-day doing yeoman's service in the administration of the new plan. About forty per cent of the ex-Rhodes Scholars are teaching in American colleges and universities, and their natural fitness for meeting the problems of the tutorial system and honors examinations has led them inevitably to drift into positions of importance in carrying out these plans. The whole movement I have described is as yet in its infancy. Probably the next ten years will see its extension on a scale far beyond anything we have at present. But it is not too soon to see in it a real opportunity for usefulness of an Oxford education, and one accomplishment, modest, yet not without great importance, of the American Rhodes Scholars.

This application of Oxford methods to American university problems is perhaps the most notable achievement of the Rhodes Scholars so far, but it does not follow that it will be the most notable one in the future. Other educational reforms, less mechanical and more funda-

mental, will require more time to mature. And outside the educational world, in the broader sphere of international relations, may yet be done the greatest work of these men. Rhodes's great idea was the dissemination by means of these scholarships of international understanding and good-will. He had at one time the idea of attempting to accomplish this by means of an international secret society which should exert a powerful though hidden influence for peace. This plan he abandoned in favor of the scholarships, and he was wise in making the change to the more open and less mechanical plan. It is to be hoped that the diplomacy of the future between democratic states will be open, controlled by the many rather than by the few. And it seems pretty evident that good-will between nations is the accumulation of good-will between individuals, springing from individual knowledge and respect, spread by friendship and understanding. It is too precious a plant for rapid growth. The dizzy way in which political alliances between nations shift from generation to generation, following the rush and flow of

real or fancied "interests," is one of the clearest and saddest facts of history. Anything more lasting must be of slower growth and be more solidly founded on individual friendship.

In this slow way may the Rhodes Scholars be expected to further the cause of peace. As a matter of fact, peace is not an end in itself, but a by-product of justice and good-will. Among individuals peace is not kept by force, but by good-will and by the realization that peace is a readier means to justice than violence. When in any given situation those feelings evaporate the peace is broken. The force behind the policeman's arm is the good-will of the citizens toward each other and their respect for the justice of their laws. Between nations it must be the same. We can hardly hope for international peace until we understand other nations well enough to like them, to be willing to trade with them freely (which means free trade and more), to wish for their success as well as for our own. The simple fact is that we in this country to-day do not understand other nations, or are learning to do so very slowly. Perhaps

the most important effect of the war on us lies in what we have learned of Europe from our daily papers, and, more important still, from our sympathy with them and from what little we have done for their relief. We have never given so much attention to the subject before. Our committees for war relief are to-day our most effective peace societies.

In a similar way every bit of international understanding brought to us by the Rhodes Scholarships, every bit of critical appreciation of the best in each other, is just so much influence for ultimate peace. Although that amount is small at present, given enough time, its total effect will be enormous. At present, perhaps the most marked effect of the Scholarships is to be found not in this country, but in England. Oxford has been critical of the Rhodes Scholars, but her criticism has been kindly, and she has been generous to the extreme in recognizing their best qualities, in taking them into her great family, and loving them as sons. The result is a kindly feeling toward America, kindly in the face of our frequent mis-

understandings of the aims and character of England, which is little realized in this country.

The German Rhodes Scholarships were a failure precisely because they failed to bring about any great degree of mutual respect and understanding. They did not fail of course in the case of all individuals, but they did in the mass. Perhaps a longer time would have made a difference—no one can say. A quiet educational influence was, however, a small and weak force to combat the mighty ambition of a nation trained for a generation to seize by force the place in the world to which it felt itself entitled. The crowning wickedness of the German point of view lies in its immense lack of any understanding of other nations, and of any sympathy with them. Germany was surprised when Belgium resisted, surprised when England entered the war, surprised when we severed diplomatic relations, surprised when we resented the plot to get Mexico and Japan to attack us: she even affected surprise when we entered the war. Some of this surprise may have been hypocritical, but it seems reasonable to attribute most of

it to her utter lack of realization of the point of view of other peoples. This is the kind of incapacity which will always make international justice and peace impossible. The effect of the American Rhodes Scholarships on peace between America and the British Empire will lie in the slow accumulation by which they will add to the mutual understanding and good-will of our two peoples. In this case the unity of language and of institutions, the tradition of long peace and friendship, our united efforts in the war, will make the task immensely easier. But at the same time it will not do to underestimate the difficulty. Political alliances change, economic "interests" shift here and there with almost the same frenzied rapidity as the stock market. Instead of putting our trust in these, instead of relying too much on machinery and organization, we must learn—the whole world must learn if we are to have peace—that those seemingly intangible elements, friendship and understanding, born of similar education and similar ideals, are in reality the enduring things.

V

ENGLISH AS HUMANE LETTERS ¹

THE non-academic part of the world, which in spite of the growth of the state universities is still a large part, takes great delight in the notion of the college graduate, trained in the lore of history, the mysteries of science, and the graces of poetry, wearing out his shoe-leather in a vain search for a job. The joke, or the fact behind it, has made its impression on the trainers of the college youth, so that in every center of learning one finds eager effort to make our education practical. A certain amount of the same kind of talk is to be heard in England, even at Oxford, but less of it, for the simple reason that English education of the last few generations, however remote it may seem in its methods, has been (if we except the engineering sciences, which Oxford has in the past made little effort to develop) obviously practical in

¹ *Atlantic Monthly*, September, 1914.

its results. Oxford and Cambridge men have ruled brilliantly the greatest empire in the world, they have given England one of the most democratic governments and almost the cleanest politics on earth, they have played their part with credit in business and in every profession.

Until quite recently, Oxford education took its tone and character mainly from training of one kind—the course in the classics which the University calls *Literæ Humaniores* and which the undergraduates call “Greats.” It is this training which has made the young Englishman an educated man, has given him efficiency in the practical world, and has made him above all else a gentleman. To-day Oxford is undergoing a gradual change, the most marked feature of which is the expansion of the curriculum; but the school of classics still retains its prestige in spite of the invasion of other studies. The reason for its prestige and for its greatness is apparent in the nature of the course.

The work of the course divides readily into two parts. The first, which corresponds roughly to our American “classical course,” is a careful

study of the principal Greek and Latin poets, orators, and dramatists. The second and more important part is a thorough study of the classic historians and philosophers, including both, but laying stress upon the one or the other as the undergraduate chooses. The study of Greek philosophy includes the study of modern philosophy as well. Taken as a whole *Literæ Humaniores* is a study not merely of the æsthetic qualities of Greek and Latin literature, but of Greek and Roman thought, and as such it offers the undergraduate what it is no exaggeration to call the key to modern civilization.

Probably no training in modern literature can be made to equal this in intellectual value. However that may be, any very extensive study of the classics is apparently impossible in America. The tide has been flowing in the direction of the moderns, and while it may turn back again, in all likelihood it will not soon. English literature is for us what the classics were to our grandfathers in this country and in England, and as perhaps the greatest modern literature, it has, aside from the question of lan-

guage, one obvious advantage over the classics as a means of popular education: it is permeated with the modern spirit, it is a record of modern thought, it deals directly with the intellectual problems and the conditions which face us, with the world as it has been refashioned by Christianity and modern science. The popularity of the study of English may be due partly to co-education, but it is also due partly to that fact.

The popularity of the study of English, however, need not blind us to the very unsatisfactory nature of its results. Whatever good things it may do for our undergraduates it does not inevitably teach them to think, does not offer them any severe intellectual discipline; it is not a good course for the man to take who wants to develop that power of sane, keen thinking which is the distinguishing mark of a liberal education.

This fact is even more apparent in the case of the students who give their attention mainly to *belles-lettres*, to the appreciation of literature, than in those who confine themselves to philology or literary history. The popular outcry against linguistics and source-hunting does not

go to the root of the matter. Among English professors and English students alike are many able men who have sought in philology and in the history of literature something solid, something of real intellectual value, something "to bite on," which they could not find in courses in literary "appreciation." And for that point of view there is this justification, that most of the graduates from our literary courses who are comparatively free from philology, and are not at all absorbed in the *minutiæ* of literary history, are lamentably deficient in power of thought, in the ability to understand literature—woefully lacking in real literary interests. Literary power is power to think and power to feel in the sense in which feeling becomes illumination and yields a result similar to the result of thought. This illumination our training in English literature seems somehow not to give.

There are of course many shining exceptions to what is here said, but the above is on the whole a fair statement of the fact, and it is a fact to be very seriously considered. Since we have in this country no immediate prospect of

a return to the classics as the vehicle of general literary education, and since English literature is daily becoming a more and more popular subject, the question of all questions for us is how to make of it a liberal study. The question is not pedagogical in the sense in which that word is usually understood; it is really literary: what are the more humane and what the less humane aspects of English letters? ✓

The obvious answer, if my analysis of the reasons for the effectiveness of the Oxford course in the classics is sound, is to make our study of English literature a study of English thought. When we treat English authors as mere entertainers whose business it is to provide elegant amusement for our idle hours, we are guilty of a misconception of the meaning of literature which is denounced specifically or implicitly by every great critic in our language, and which is certain to prevent all or almost all the possible good results of our study. The answer is to get entirely away from that theory of literature and to realize that the poets and novelists and essayists are men who are trying to unify

and explain life to us, and to give us the zest for it which their divine vision has brought to them. We must face literature squarely, recognize in it a record of the meaning of our civilization, and, without confusing it for a moment with history or philosophy, give full weight to its historical and social and philosophical bearings. Finally, in order to give our students any love of literature which will be more serious than an idle flirtation, we must make plain to them that their first business is not to "appreciate" but to understand.

It may seem self-evident that the value of the work of any great man of letters lies in the record of what may be called, in the wide sense explained above, his thought about life; and that the student must have some idea of this before he will know how to read profitably, and before the study of literary history or of the technique of any literary form can have for him much meaning. However self-evident such an idea may seem, it is constantly ignored. We go on teaching the history of literature and the technique of literary forms to our students before

they have any elementary notions of the significance of literature itself, which alone would make such study profitable. We talk about the "style" of this author and that, paying the scantiest attention to his ideas, omitting the substance to contemplate the form. However tortuous and super-subtle the lore of our subject may seem from other points of view, in this sense it is superficial. The one treatment of English literature which would give the study of it literary value or make it a part of a liberal education is that treatment which lays emphasis primarily on what English authors have to say about life, what were the problems of life which they were trying to solve, what to them were its mysteries and its meaning. To talk frankly and thoughtfully about these questions, to get to the bottom, to make our teaching the expression of what we really believe about the deepest things of life,—the things about which the poets are talking,—to do this most of us are either too lazy or too *blasé*.

Much of our greatest English literature is read by the American undergraduate, if at all,

not in the English department, but in the department of philosophy or sociology or history or theology or the fine arts. We have gradually narrowed the content of our literary courses until we have little left except descriptions of nature, love stories, and lyrics. The habit of using books filled with brief selections from a large number of authors prevents the student from getting any clear and complete notion of what any English man of letters was really trying to say. The study of the development of literary forms has crowded out the study of literary thought. We give years to the study of "style" in courses which, in their selection of illustrative reading, tacitly deny that definition of style which is always on our lips. If the style is of the man, can we not perhaps understand its secret better by studying the man himself, by placing our attention less upon externals, and more upon his thought?

Such a study of English literature would demand much more, both of instructor and student, than is usually demanded at present. It would demand hard and careful thinking, it

would reach out into domains of thought which our habit of rigid departmental specialization has led us to believe we have no business to enter. It would involve consideration of the thought of other nations which has influenced our own intellectual leaders. It would mean the acquisition of some conception of that complex body of thought which we know as western civilization, and, in the case of our keenest students, it would lead eventually to a study of the classics as well.

Such a study of English literature would remove the reproach of formalism and shallowness which we deserve at present, because of our too exclusive preoccupation with academic falsities about style and about the "evolution" of literary forms. It would mean a study of men, and of currents of thought rather than of separate lyrics and "minor poems," selected and printed in textbooks because of their convenience for separate assignment and class-discussion. It would mean attempting less and doing it better; keeping undergraduate study to a few important men and a few influential movements, instead

of spreading it over the whole history of English literature from Beowulf to Bridges. The undergraduates would be distinctly better off if they heard less about minor eighteenth-century poets and minor Elizabethan dramatists, and instead read more of Bacon and more of our great nineteenth-century thinkers on social and religious and scientific questions. Literature, so taught, would become a more thoughtful, a humaner, a more really literary study, and its students would be in a position to apprehend better the meaning of the glib formula, "Literature is a criticism of life."

It would be rash to attempt in a short space to block out a definite programme for such an English course as is here advocated. The sixth essay and the tenth in this volume describe attempts made by the author to apply these principles to the elementary course at Indiana University and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; these may suggest to some readers one way of beginning. The essence of the task on the whole would seem to be to link our study of literature more closely with his-

tory and social life on the one hand, and with philosophy on the other. As it is, we put too much emphasis upon minor literary men, and too little upon great thinkers whose work is not exactly a part of our *belles-lettres*. We follow too minutely the development of literary forms, and do not pay enough attention to important conditions of social and political life. We should take over and make a part of our English courses much which is now taught by professors of history and economics and philosophy. It is not sufficient that we require students to take courses in those departments; we should emphasize the essential relation which those subjects bear to literature. Such a training would be infinitely sounder and would mean infinitely more for the purposes of true education than the training which the average student gets at the present time under the name of English. To the carrying out of such a programme our rigid departmental system would of course be an obstacle; the present tendency to organize departments into groups or divisions seems to point to a way by which it could be overcome.

Not the least of the benefits from such a change in attitude would be a change in the form and content of undergraduate essays. We should have fewer light and airy descriptions, fewer inane stories, fewer self-conscious apings of Lamb and Stevenson, and in their place more serious efforts to say what a certain book or poem or paragraph or phrase means when one thinks about it. The result would be that many problems of English composition would solve themselves, and the subject (as a separate study) would probably disappear from our universities, to the great relief and advantage of all concerned. We should need all the student's writing as a test and record of his understanding of what he read.

Of course if English literature were really made a thoughtful study with the majority, many of its votaries who seek in it merely a graceful accomplishment or the means of being "wafted to the skies"—in this case to a degree—"on flowery beds of ease," would be driven away. In the survivors we might look for results which we do not find at present: an ade-

quate mastery of a few books and a few questions, some real comprehension of the significance of literature, some genuine intellectual interests, and, above all, capacity for thought which, as it is the one result of education really to be called practical, is also the one literary quality. So pursued, the study of English letters might become, if not equal in value to the study of the Greek and Roman classics, at any rate a more humane pursuit.

VI

AN EXPERIMENT WITH THE FRESHMAN COURSE¹

I

THE man who contemplates thoughtfully our university instruction in English, aside from the work of a few great teachers, is likely to question very seriously the value of the training which it offers to the multitude of students who make it their specialty. In some cases English seems to be merely an elegant pastime, in others a highly specialized and very dull and useless part of history—the one and the other equally ill adapted as material for a liberal education. Often enough the results are such as to justify one's doubts: many of the graduates from our English courses show the thinness of their training in their lack of ability to think, in their feeble mastery of the thought of past ages, in their lack of any real grasp of the sig-

¹ *Educational Review*, April, 1912.

nificance of the literature they have been studying. Such is the state of affairs which furnishes the occasion of this essay, but my purpose here is not to reform the teaching of the whole subject. It is the less ambitious one of suggesting what I believe to be an improvement over the usual freshman course, although the principles upon which my argument is based, if sound, should be applied to most of the undergraduate teaching of English. The suggestions I am making are concerned almost entirely with the subject-matter of the course, and not with what would be called, in the pedagogical sense, the method of teaching. The machinery of the freshman course is important: even Mark Hopkins could not dispose of a class of four hundred on the other end of a log, but the most important question is: What shall we teach? To that question this essay is devoted.

According to the prevailing method, the subject is divided into two courses, one to teach composition, and the other literature.¹ Some-

¹ Parts of the first section of this article are reprinted, by permission, from a letter in the *Nation* of December 1, 1910.

times the students who wish to do more work in English are required to take only the first: sometimes they are compelled to take both. The aim of the composition course is to give the student correctness and power in writing—"clearness, force, and ease." To this end he is required to write and speak a great deal, and his productions are criticized by his teacher and classmates mainly from the rhetorical point of view—that is, according to the form in which the ideas are expressed. Usually the undergraduate is directed to write many short themes, and these on subjects rather easy to understand, in order that he may be freer to fix his attention upon form. A student produces an enormous number of these compositions during his career in high school and college. He is rigorously held to the task: the excuse so often made that he has run out of ideas and has nothing to write is never so much as considered by the teacher. The theory is that any ideas whatsoever can be made into a good theme if only well enough expressed. How to dress nature to advantage is the whole study.

In literature the most popular form of introductory course seems to be a rapid survey of English literary history from Alfred or Chaucer to Tennyson. The purpose is to give the members of the class a bird's-eye view in order that they may understand, so to speak, the possibilities of the subject, may have their curiosity excited by different periods and authors, and be thus stimulated to further reading and study, and that they may learn at the beginning the place of each author in what is often called the evolution of English literature.

To the writer it seems that these methods are not successful. This essay is an attempt to explain the nature of a course, given for four years (1908-1912) at Indiana University, based upon the opposite theory, namely, that the value of English literature is something quite distinct from its history or from the analysis of its form and technique; that this literary study of literature, as it might be called, should precede a formal or historical study of it; that the only way to teach students to write is to teach them to think of *what* they are writing,

not *how* they are writing; and that the most economical and interesting way to teach composition is in connection with the study of literature, making the themes one means of testing the student's understanding of the books which he is reading.

Probably university teachers take it too much for granted that the members of their classes know why they are studying a particular subject, and hence neglect what is very necessary, namely, to indicate the general importance of the subject, its relation to other knowledge, and the good which the individual may expect to get from it. If the student is to plan his own education he needs all the help of this kind he can get. It is especially true of English literature that undergraduates study it blindly, not thinking much about what they want or what they could reasonably expect it to do for them. Whereas in many subjects the value is obvious, the value of literature, on the other hand, is not obvious, and many people who are studying and some who are teaching it would have difficulty in giving a sensible reason for the way in which

they are spending their time. The problem, then, is not to give the student first of all a history of English literature or a knowledge of the principles of style, but it is rather to give him a conception of the whole subject, some notion of literature as a record of thought, and to make that notion as clear and definite as possible. The phrase "the meaning of literature" smacks of various unpleasant and sentimental associations, but if we have the courage to disregard these for a moment, it is plain that some idea of the meaning of literature is the most important thing to be taught in a freshman course. We should select from the best of our English writers as many works as can be studied carefully and no more, covering an extent of time and a variety of material wide enough to give some notion of the range of the subject, and study these for their meaning (that is, to get out of them as fully and completely as possible the most important things that the author was trying to say), bringing to bear on this work just as much study of history and of style as will aid the

student and not retard him. Perhaps one cannot go far with this in a year, but the knowledge acquired, as far as it does extend, will be real, involving thought and sense of proportion as well as memory.

The plans which I described as the usual method of teaching English literature and composition tend toward standardization of the product: certain information and opinions are taught in the literature classes; a certain low standard of good form is reached in the classes in composition. Now standardization may be very useful in some cases, but it is a bad ideal for the teaching of freshman English. What is wanted there is that the students should become more different, not more alike. In literature the important thing is not that the student should know any particular body of facts, but rather that, so far as he goes, he should understand the meaning of the works he studies—that he should learn to think as he reads. Let him go on thinking and reading and discussing, and his opinions will become as orthodox and his knowledge as catholic as they need to be.

In composition it is of first importance not that he should learn to write sentences and paragraphs according to any specific pattern, but that he should think hard and convey his thoughts to his teacher as clearly as possible. He will be quick to see his failures if he is really trying to say something and not merely to produce a theme, and then he will be in the right frame of mind to undertake as thorough a study of form as the importance of his ideas demands. So studied, English literature and English composition will develop his individual power of thinking, which is the contribution these subjects should make toward his education.

II

In his perversely ingenious book called *What is Art?* Tolstoy takes a position which would deny to all teachers of literature the right to such slender amount of bread as can now be obtained by their profession. Art, he says, is essentially unteachable, and its decadence is due in no small measure to the mistaken activity of teachers and critics. A work of art,

according to him, is that which communicates feeling from one man to another, from the artist to the audience. If it does not do this, it is not art; if it does, what is the need to explain it? Universal intelligibility is an essential attribute of true art, and it is only the presence of a group of misguided persons whose business it is to teach and explain it that has blinded men's eyes to this fact and furthermore spread the belief in that false art, so common at present, which is not intelligible, even prides itself on not being so, and which, having thus narrowed its audience, has likewise narrowed and vitiated its subject-matter until it has become an abomination.

At first sight it is not easy to point out a flaw in Tolstoy's logic, nor is it easy to evade his conclusion, namely, that while there may be some reason for scientific teachers (historians, philologists, and the like) to expound the history of art or the nature of its material, there is no excuse for the teacher who is trying to explain the nature and meaning of art itself. The man to whom this skeleton of Tolstoy's argument seems nonsense would do well to read

and ponder over the book. Nevertheless I do not believe that his position is sound. I shall try to explain my meaning by outlining what I conceive to be the real vocation of the teacher of literature and the real function of criticism.

Tolstoy's statement that true art is universally intelligible must, it seems to me, be modified so as to read: True art is intelligible to all men who have questions to ask of it. It is a fact—which never ceases to be the marvel of all marvels—that many men have no questions to ask. To them the world has no mysteries, or almost none. They live their lives, certain of their aims, certain of the rules of the game which they have chosen to play, certain of the value of the stakes which they hope to win. In their lives day by day there is no wonder: they die with no thought as to whether anything or nothing will happen after death. In this fact lies the basis of the age-long feud between the poet or the scientist and the man in the street. To the non-thinker life is conventional, fixed, and expected: the physical world is plain and easy to understand; human nature is the same every-

where. To the thinker, on the other hand, it is a baffling, alluring problem. To the man of scientific imagination, what we call knowledge of the physical world seems only the expression of our wonder, and to the poet the universe is likewise wonderful, filled with beauty so mysterious that to perceive it is an act of faith. So that it is almost a distinction between the thinker and the non-thinker to say that it is a matter not of knowledge, but of wonder. The first is the man with many questions to ask; the second, the man with none.

This sense of the mystery of life is the first essential for an understanding of science or an appreciation of poetry. It is here that the teacher finds his main work to do. To open the student's eyes to the world, to suggest to him some of the problems of education, of politics, of religion, and the methods of poetry and science in seeking for solutions—this is the function of the teacher of literature. It is a difficult task but a real one, and one which, honestly attempted, will give the teacher the joy of doing a man's work—a joy which the task of making

doubtful analyses of structure and technique and spinning out precious comments on the "fine shades" will not give.

Upon these principles was based the first term's work of our freshman course. The idea was to break through the crust of conventional notions which prevents the student from thinking by hiding from him the fact that life has problems yet unsolved. We undertook to make him realize that the world is a different place to each man—made what it is by the honesty and depth of his thought about it. We tried to start him thinking about the problems which confront him. We were concerned not so much that he should become a devotee of literature as that he should acquire a thoughtful attitude toward the world. The most important thing needed to make a student of literature or of any other subject is intellectual curiosity.

In the first theme which the students wrote we asked them to answer as fully and honestly as they could some such question as this: What benefit do you expect to get from your stay at the University? Their answers were usually

serious, though not always very intelligent. Most college students are seeking advancement in life, and hope to get from the university the training which will enable them to advance by means of this work or that. A few have no more definite motive than willingness to learn things which men consider worth learning: they have done well in the high school and believe that they owe it to themselves to go on with their studies. Their belief in education is based only on hearsay, on the hypnotic force of public opinion. They are not thinkers, but they are willing workers, ready to devote their best efforts to whatever tasks are given them, anxious for any direction they can get as to what is best to do, and willing to do it up to any standard of excellence they can be made to comprehend. Intellectually they are passive, although they may be aggressive enough in other ways. They come to the university to learn, not to think. They will assent to almost anything they hear or read; they will hold in their minds various contradictory opinions without making any effort to reconcile them; and they are filled with vague

dread and terror at the notion of trying to work out anything for themselves. They wish to make their journey through the "realms of gold" in a personally conducted party, with no side trips. I am not saying this to disparage American students. In spite of all this, the right teacher can get from them excellent work, but he must clearly understand his problem, and this passive state of mind is one important element in it. Doubtless it is much better that they should come to the university without having attacked questions beyond their years, much better that their high-school training should be devoted to learning things which they can learn (better then than later) than that it should be spent in thinking about things which they could not understand. But their university training should be different, chiefly in this, that now they should begin to think as well as to learn.

III

Stated in such abstract form, the programme of our first term's work will, I fear, strike the reader as so overwhelming in extent and so

vague and intangible in essence as to be likely to result in nothing but a confused jumble of big phrases ill understood, an inchoate wail about the mystery of life poured into the freshman's ears at just the moment when, according to the demand of the brisk, busy spirit of modern education, he should be storing up daily bits of perfectly clear and definite information which he can put to sound uses later on. If the preceding paragraphs have given that impression I hope to make the following ones dispel it.

Our academic year at Indiana University, from the end of September to the end of June, was then divided into three terms of twelve weeks each. I propose now to describe the work of this course for the first term. The reading consisted of four or five of the following books:

Newman: *Idea of a University*.

Arnold: *Culture and Anarchy*.

Huxley: Essays, mostly from *Science and Education*.

Ruskin: *Unto This Last* and *Sesame and Lilies*.

Carlyle: *Past and Present* and *Heroes and Hero-Worship*.¹

Our method for the first term was to select from the works of the great English thinkers of the nineteenth century those books which deal in a clear and popular, and at the same time fundamental, manner with three or four questions: education, social and political life, and religion, selecting among these writers at least one scientist whose work is so clear in its perception of the significance of scientific thought as to be also literature. The aim of this work was to suggest some of the fundamental problems with which literature is concerned and to teach the students to think as they read. We tried to select the men whose grasp of these questions is deepest and truest—men who see their subject most clearly, who see it not merely in details, but as a whole, men whose

¹ For the sake of clearness I may as well outline the reading of the whole year in this place. During the second and third terms we studied four poets—Wordsworth, Pope, Milton, and Shakespeare—applying to this study the ideas developed in the first term.

work best measures the value of English civilization up to this time.

To these books I may apply the term criticism, using the word in the sense which Matthew Arnold gives to it in his essay "On the Function of Criticism at the Present Time." The business of the critic, Arnold says, is to supply to the creative writer materials for his work. The materials of literature are ideas. The poet, like most men, depends for his ideas upon the time in which he lives; he is not usually a scholar, he is not so much a student of the past as a student of the life about him, of the ideas of his time as men express them in conduct. His task, however, is not merely to reproduce photographically the life which he sees: it is to give that kind of portrayal of it which we call art—a portrayal which is in reality a comment on life, an explanation of its significance. The artist must see life and know it intimately, but he must see it and know it not from its level but from above. Now the function of the critic, as Arnold conceives it, is to bring to bear upon the thought of his time a current of true and fresh ideas,

the thought of other times and of other nations, in order to supplement, to broaden, and to correct it, wherever it is narrow or false. By so broadening and enriching the thought of his age the critic will stimulate the creative artist to reflection, will offer other points of view for his consideration, will help to raise him to that height from which it is possible to see life justly; will, in short, supply the artist with materials for his work.

What Arnold has said of the creative intelligence of the writer is no less true of the creative intelligence of the reader. He also must have ideas, must be a thinker, in order to understand literature, and the wider the range of his ideas, the more truly he is master of the best thought of his own age and of other ages as well, the better will he be able to understand and the more justly to appreciate the literature which he reads.

The word "criticism" as here used is to be understood in Arnold's sense. The purpose of the reading I have described by it was to widen the range of the student's thought, to give him,

within the limits possible, an introduction to some of the materials of literature.

The problems which we discussed were those fundamental ones which have the widest bearing upon poetry and upon all great thought, and those which are in a real sense the most practical. The first of these is the problem of education. The essential thing to be made clear about literature before the student can get any right conception of it is that all literature worthy of the name is a means to education, perhaps the most effective of all means by which one man teaches another. Education means the development of one's power to think. The value of the study of the thought of another man is that the student should be thereby stimulated to think for himself. No thought is true for him which he himself cannot think: what he has thought through for himself becomes his own. One cannot understand a poem or a novel or a play except by thinking about it. The real readers of a book are those whose thought answers the thought of the author: they are the "fit audience" for whom he writes. Unthink-

ing readers are not readers at all, and the student must realize this or the study of literature will profit him little.

Over and over again the statement has been made that the end of the greatest literature is pleasure, not instruction; and this statement has occasioned endless perplexity in the minds of those who have not understood it. Unquestionably there are many books from which one derives amusement and practically nothing else, and they are not to be despised on that account, but they are not a part of our greatest literature. Let me quote two utterances on the subject, apparently opposite, really consistent, which will suggest the position which I wish to define. The first is by Dr. Furnivall, from Furnivall and Munro's *Life of Shakespeare*: "The revived doctrine that the main object of poetry is to *please*, *amuse*, seems to me too contemptible to be discuss. I don't believe the mere wish to please ever produced anything better than toys." Another, from Wordsworth's Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*: "Nor let this necessity of producing immediate pleasure be considered as a

degradation of the Poet's art. It is far otherwise. It is an acknowledgement of the beauty of the universe, an acknowledgement the more sincere, because not formal, but indirect; it is a task light and easy to him who looks at the world in the spirit of love: further, it is a homage paid to the native and naked dignity of man, to the grand elementary principle of pleasure, by which he knows, and feels, and lives, and moves."

Between the two the question is merely verbal, and the point is this. The business of the poet is to say the most serious and the truest things about life that his divine vision reveals to him. His business is to tell us the truth, to show us the way of life. But serious men have found, and always do find, in the pursuit and contemplation of such ideas the highest type of pleasure. There is no amusement that does not pall at length and leave us restless and unsatisfied. The toilsome pursuit of knowledge seems to be the one thing in which man finds deep and enduring satisfaction. Of all his appetites this is the deepest rooted, and of all his occupations

this seems most worth while. If one understands pleasure in this high sense, the end of poetry is pleasure. If not, it is nearer the truth to say that its end is to instruct.

But the word education means many things to our students, and it is necessary to spend some time defining terms. Aside from the value for the study of literature, the consideration of what are the ends of education, which ends are most worthy and which least, what are the effective means toward it, what is true education and what false, is also of immediate practical value to the student who is compelled under the elective system to map out his own course. He must think about the subject, he must make choices, whether wisely or foolishly, and he is eager for any light upon it that he can get. The best books we found upon which to base our study of these problems were the *Idea of a University*, by Cardinal Newman, and the *Essays* of Huxley. These men are thinkers, not impressionists; whether right or wrong, they know what they mean; they approach their subject from a height (to use one

of Newman's phrases) ; they are intensely practical, if by practical one means considering the subject always with regard to its bearing upon life; and their exposition of principles is so clear as to be perfectly within the grasp of any freshman intelligent enough to hope to make progress in the study of literature. A few weeks devoted to a careful reading of these books will not settle for the student all educational problems, but they will give him a basis from which to attack them, a point of view which will enable him to understand and properly relate other opinions which he reads or hears upon the subject. By making clear a few fundamental ideas, this study will open his mind to a thousand problems in regard to it: it will at the same time make clear a few old questions and suggest many new ones.

The reading of Newman and Huxley demands that the student should think and write about such topics as the relation of knowledge to information, the difference between liberal and useful knowledge, the relation of knowledge to morality, the value of science and of literature

to education. Naturally the undergraduate does not say the final word on any of these subjects; it will be the teacher's fault if the student does not realize that his grasp of them is far from perfect. But they are questions which he must think about in planning his education; and they are questions upon which it is perfectly possible for him to understand the position of Newman and of Huxley, and to have an intelligent opinion of his own. Both the reading and the themes offer severe discipline in thinking. The students immediately apply the views of Newman and Huxley to their work and aims; the result, in the minds of most of them, is a much clearer idea of what they want from the university and what they can expect from the study of literature.

Such work as this is not vague or intangible. Nor did we feel that it overtaxed the student's powers. A freshman capable of planning his own course is certainly able to understand Newman's distinction between information and real knowledge or Huxley's striking figure of the Alpine mother. Nor, further, did such work

leave the student in confusion. The ideas he gained were real and definite; and because from this elevation he was able to see new questions, "Alps on Alps" rising in front of him, and hence had a somewhat humbler attitude toward the subject—because of this his position was really not more confused but clearer. And yet such work did give him a lively notion of the difficulties in the matter; it gave him that elementary knowledge which makes curiosity possible.

Space does not allow me to explain how in connection with *Culture and Anarchy*, *Unto This Last*, and *Heroes and Hero-Worship* we discussed the relation of literature to social and political life, and to religion. *Heroes and Hero-Worship* is likely, it seems to me, to prove for the beginner the most illuminating work of criticism in our language, because it emphasizes over and over again the conception of the poet as a teacher of men, a leader of thought, and because it contains an endlessly suggestive account of the particular kind of instruction which literature has to offer.

Our task was to raise the questions which I have outlined and to give the students some of the ideas of our greatest nineteenth-century writers about them. We had no propaganda to advance; we tried to open the questions, to deal as fairly and as intelligently as possible with the books we read, and to set the students thinking. These are not problems to be referred to experts merely; they are questions which every intelligent man must think about for himself if we are to have a society in which there will be any audience for the opinions of the expert—the scholar and the philosopher. The problems are not of our making nor of Newman's nor Carlyle's nor Huxley's. They face the student in the world. They are questions which literature and science and philosophy alike have as their mission to solve.

The books which I have described are works of criticism in the sense of Arnold's illuminating definition. Reading criticism is bad for the student only when it is misleading. Criticism which is concerned solely with the analysis of technique, with the tracing of sources and lines

of influence, with the making of literary estimates or the passing of judgments without first explaining the principles upon which these estimates and these judgments are based—in short, criticism which, in commenting upon literature, places the emphasis somewhere else than upon the idea, is for the young student misleading. True criticism, which is trying “to see the object as in itself it really is,” which endeavors “to create a current of true and fresh ideas,” has for the student the greatest value; it is the definition of intelligent appreciation and must ever be the goal of the study of literature. Arnold says of the English poetry of the early nineteenth century that, great though it be, it is in places empty of matter, incoherent, wanting in completeness and variety, because of the fact that it lacks ideas, lacks materials to work with. This comment, whether true or not of the Romantic poets, is unquestionably true of our university study of literature. It is not true of our study of literary history: but the study of literary history, valuable as it is, cannot entirely take the place of the study of literature itself; and

the truest word that can be said of the usual study of literature in our universities is that it lacks ideas. It lacks ideas of the sort that we tried to put into this first term's work, ideas which are necessary to any adequate conception of its meaning.

IV

It will be quite clear from what I have said that in our study of poetry we aimed primarily to understand its meaning. That would seem to be the natural thing to do, but nevertheless it is a task which, so far as my experience goes, teachers of English literature usually evade. It is evaded (most of all in the freshman course) by teachers who are so engrossed in laying a foundation of historical knowledge about literature (which knowledge in its proper subordinate place is of course an admirable help to understanding it) that they never come to the principal matter, and the greater number of our students, whose study of literature ends here, leave the university with no more conception of its meaning than they had when they entered.

Again, it is evaded (oftener in advanced courses) by teachers who are engaged in elaborate analyses of literary structure and technique, which study is likewise valuable for the student who has learned to read intelligently, and likewise worthless for the one who has not. It is evaded, in the third place, by a large class of mystics, who, to save the trouble of thinking, treat poetry as something to be enjoyed without being understood, men who bid us read poetry, and thank God for it, and think no more about it. Any attempt to understand it they call philosophizing, and since they despise philosophy, this is a vile reproach. It is this class of evaders and the second who are responsible for the thin quality of the education ordinarily obtained from the study of English literature. The history of literature offers scholarly discipline even if the student gets nothing else: misty, unthinking, rhapsodical "appreciation" offers nothing but empty words:

The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But, swoln with wind and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread.

All this we have made of the study of the "best that has been thought and said in the world," simply because we have not seen it as it is. Literature has a meaning more important than any lore about it, which is not the result of juggling with words, and which is not to be discovered by any method except by thoughtfully trying to understand it.

The first essential for understanding this meaning is, as I have said, that we should have wondered about life; that we should

take upon's the mystery of things
As if we were God's spies;

that we should seek in literature the great thing which it has to offer, namely, high and serious thought about the problems that beset every man. Although our students when they come to the university have little disposition to wonder, very little tendency to think about things on their own account, it is easy to awaken in the best of them keen interest in every kind of problem. Once aroused from their apathy, their natural curiosity causes them to seek in poetry

not amusement, but illumination. Indeed they are impatient of anything which does not promise answers to their questions; on the whole, they prefer tragedy to comedy, thoughtful poetry rather than dainty lyrics, serious thought in an essay rather than grace and humor. "Jesting is not suited to youth," says Fichte, and his words are true, "they know little of man who think so; where youth is wasted in sport it will never attain to earnestness and true existence. The portion of Youth in life is the Earnest and the Sublime—only after such a youth does maturity attain to the Beautiful, and with it to sportful enjoyment of the vulgar." Humor, grace, daintiness, finish—indeed all the more delicate qualities of literature depend for their proper appreciation upon a background of seriousness and thought. To him who has not this background they are pointless: nonsense rests upon sense, daintiness upon strength. It is only in the calmness of the mature and cultivated mind that the finer graces of literature can be truly valued, and maturity and culture are reached only by thinking about the more earnest

and more fundamental problems of art and of life.

For the sake of clearness it is necessary to repeat that I do not mistake poetry for philosophy, history, or science, and when I talk about its meaning I do not imagine that it can be "translated" into any of these. It has its bearing upon them as they upon it; it is made of the same "life stuff," but, to use a phrase of Professor Bradley's, the connections are underground. The poet gives his account of life just as the scientist and the philosopher give theirs. They are different versions, drawings made from different points of view, with immediate purposes different, but all having the same ultimate purpose—to understand the world and this our life.

The four poets whom we studied—Wordsworth, Pope, Milton, and Shakespeare—are those who have given to English civilization of the last four centuries its most important poetic expression. To read them understandingly is an introduction to the history of English thought. Each has his own attitude toward the problems

of social life, of politics, of religion, and his own measure of the power or weakness of man's mind which define the possibilities of education. Our task was to explain these ideas, to make the class see as clearly as possible the point of view of each poet toward life. Of course we could not fulfill this task perfectly, and we made the class understand that they were getting only an introduction to the history of literature, not all of it.

The first poet we read was Wordsworth. I can best explain our study of him by mentioning some of the things we left undone. We did not try to "unweave the rainbow of Romanticism." We did not try to pronounce upon the consistency or inconsistency of Wordsworth's revolt against "poetic diction." We did not spread nor did we try to contradict the popular belief as to his "inequality." We spent no time commenting on his revival of the sonnet or his Miltonic mastery of blank verse. We made no attempt to analyze the merits and defects of his narrative and descriptive methods. These subjects are all interesting, and it is easy

for a class to put down and remember anything that is said about them, but they are not the most important things for the freshman to study in Wordsworth. The important matter is his ideas—what it is that he has to say. One chapter in Professor Raleigh's book on Wordsworth is entitled "Illumination"; it is this which we tried to get at in our study of his poetry, to understand as far as we could his "authentic tidings of unseen things."

Our study of Pope, of Milton, and of Shakespeare followed much the same plan. We tried in each case, within the limits of what was possible, to get the most important things which each poet has to say. In the lectures and class work we furnished the student with as much information about the times as was necessary to make these ideas intelligible. We compared one poet with another, not so much to form judgments as to make the position of each clear. The student made his own judgments: our task was to help him to understand poetry, to get from it the best that it has to give: we let him estimate that best according to its worth to him,

which depended upon many conditions over which his teachers had no control.

Many persons, who would agree to the application of such a plan of study as I have outlined to Wordsworth, Pope, and Milton, would perhaps not see how it could be applied to Shakespeare. The first three are didactic, they would say; he is not. The first three made it their professed object to mold the opinion of cultivated men: both Pope and Wordsworth echo Milton's lofty prologue; each is

intent to weigh

The good and evil of our mortal state,

each undertakes to

assert Eternal Providence,

And justify the ways of God to men.

But Shakespeare, my objectors will say, undertook only to amuse a ragamuffin Bankside audience. He watched the pageant of the world go by, he was interested in it, he has preserved many sketches of it for our enjoyment, but he did not think about it, or if he did, he has not left us his thoughts.

As a matter of fact, each character in Shakespeare represents a theory of life—a theory which in the case of each important person is worked out with great fullness and reality. Of course there are stock figures, whose actions are determined by the demands of the plot and are to be taken for granted, who can scarcely be said to have any thoughts, but the important ones are all thinkers. The greatest of them are poets, and their best speeches contain Shakespeare's sympathetic justification of their lives. Often Shakespeare seems more interested in explaining the action than in advancing it. Nine-tenths of the great passages are thoughtful; many of them are soliloquies, or arguments and explanations, during which the play seems to stand still. However, it does not stand still; the essential part of the action is this interplay of character, and the fullness with which the secret springs and motives are presented gives to these plays their wonderful richness and reality. In order to understand Shakespeare it is first of all important that the student should

think about the questions which confront his characters.

Shakespeare does more than present in each person he has created a certain theory of life; he presents also a commentary upon it, an estimate of its worth. This comment is not philosophical but entirely poetical. He shows us in each case not merely the thoughts and motives, but the result of those thoughts and motives and of the actions caused by them. This is not a matter of success from the standpoint of plot but rather of greatness from the standpoint of character. Henry V is successful, Hamlet is a failure; but it is perfectly plain to any one who can read the language of poetry that Hamlet lives in another and higher world, a world of which Henry, with all his clear-eyed grasp of fact, has never seen the border. So one might illustrate from all the plays. What one finds in Shakespeare is his working out of this theory and that, his estimate of its worth: in other words, a highly complex comment on the world, its glory, its shame, its aspirations, its failures, and its victory—a comment which can be under-

stood by thinking about it and in no other way.

He insists upon the complexity of it. He offers for our consideration not one view but many. Life was to him anything but simple. Only the most robust of thinkers can follow him through such a range. However, because he has said, this is to be weighed on the one side, that on the other, he is not therefore serving the interests of confusion but those of truth. He seems determined to consider every element, to give every man a sympathetic hearing, to state every point of view. There is a story told of Robert Louis Stevenson which illustrates my point. He was asked if he had a moral which he was trying to advance in a certain story. "No," he replied, "no moral of my own: it's God's moral that I'm trying to get hold of." More than any man who has written in English, Shakespeare seems to have been trying to understand "God's moral" in its infinite complexity. If the result is to leave us humble and thoughtful rather than to give us a doctrine to propagate, one need not say on that account that

Shakespeare has not thought about life or that he has not left us his thoughts.

Of course the teacher who is narrow and blind, whose every statement is based on authority instead of reason, sentimentality instead of feeling, will fail to do justice to the varied and complex world of thought contained in the works of our poets. From such teachers we have the weary multiplication of false and petty "morals" which are appended—each to its poem—and taught as the "meaning of literature." Such spectacles—repeated as they are on every side of us—tempt the violent man to deny out of hand that literature has any meaning. I fancy that this revulsion against sentimentality has had a greater effect on the teaching of poetry than most people would imagine. One extreme has bred the other. The sound position, as I conceive it, is to make the study of literature neither an arid manipulation of dry bones, nor an emotional debauch, but a sound discipline dealing with real ideas and yielding to the successful student that pleasure which comes with knowledge. The surest protection

against sentimentality will be to insist upon thought.

Thus it is that our teaching of poetry was an attempt to illustrate Carlyle's statement, "It is a man's sincerity and depth of vision that makes him a poet." It is the truth which men feel in this vision which makes them value poetry. It is the pleasure which comes from the satisfaction of this highest of all human desires—the desire to know—which causes men to say that the end of poetry is pleasure. And it is the study of poetry from this point of view which will lead the student to see the meaning and to estimate the truth of such a statement as that of Wordsworth: "Poetry is the breath and finer spirit of all knowledge; it is the impassioned expression which is in the countenance of all science."

V

I propose finally to explain how we applied these theories to our composition work. In our course we required rather less writing than usual—only one theme a week. This weekly

theme was not a mere exercise in composition: its function was to test the student's understanding of the literature we were studying (not ideas about this literature but the ideas expressed in it) and also to test and develop his power of applying these ideas. The principal emphasis was laid upon the subject-matter: the student's grade depended most of all upon what he had said. Mechanical correctness (by which I mean decent spelling and punctuation, good grammar, and thoughtful paragraphing) was presupposed. Most college students do well enough in these respects if they take pains; to those who did not we gave extra conferences and frequent exercises to bring them up, and if they could not reach a reasonable standard they did not pass. But they were never allowed to believe that mechanical correctness alone constitutes good writing. Correctness, they were told, is an absolutely necessary but yet subordinate matter: good writing depends upon having something to say and upon getting it said.

The study of language is long and hard and

necessary in order to write well, but the first thing is to have something to say and a sensible reason for saying it. The idea is the principal thing, the expression the subordinate. Without the first the second is meaningless, cannot exist, much less be studied or practiced or taught. Here is the weakness of composition work designed to offer "practice in writing." The attempt is made to give practice in writing to students who have nothing to say, which means that neither teacher nor pupil understands what he is about. Grades are given for a certain cleverness in juggling words, not for cogency of thought, and people are surprised when students who have obtained the best marks in composition in the universities cannot write anything that one cares to read.

We graded the student on the subject-matter of his themes, according to the clearness and importance of his thought. We did not give him credit for the ideas he had in mind but did not express, although of course we passed many students whose expression of their thoughts was far from excellent. A halting and clumsy ex-

pression of a real idea is worth a thousand times more anywhere and for any purpose than glib and facile emptiness. It is only from the point of view of the idea that the student can get a sound conception of the problem of writing. It is only when he is trying to say something that he can really understand the difficulties in the use of words, and be made to see any path toward their solution. The themes were criticized in individual conferences, and there our method was to make the comments that each seemed most to need, not trying too much to simplify the matter but endeavoring to make the student see the intimate way in which word and idea are linked together. We made the themes real work, tests of thinking rather than practice in language. We tried to put each individual in the way of making progress, to lead him as far as he could go, rather than to bring the whole class up to a certain level. Experience and reason alike show that this can best be done by keeping clearly before the student that the business of writing is to say something and by grading him on the quality of his thinking.

This standard is an attempt to keep things in their true proportion and to judge by results. It is not a simple standard; instead it is a complex one, as every estimate of a finished result must be. But it can be applied with success where a simple one could not.

The subject-matter of the themes was closely connected with the reading done in the course, but they were not allowed to become "infant criticism" of the high school "book report" variety. The student's ordinary task was not to write about an author, nor about a book, nor even about a single chapter. Instead he was given one point to explain more fully, to comment on, or to relate to something else that he had studied. The difference between the two tasks is important: given a whole chapter to condense into a theme, the student becomes vague and the result is a confused jumble of badly expressed ideas; at the best the average undergraduate produces a synopsis which can be understood fully only with reference to the original, or a comment which he has not space to make entirely clear. The trouble is that he

has been compelled to try to handle more material than he can hold vividly in his mind at one time. On the other hand, given a single point to amplify or discuss, the student has time and space to do himself justice, and if he understands it he will produce a clear explanation from his point of view, or a comment containing some real thought of his own. In practice we asked for comments only from the better students, advising those of less ability to content themselves with explaining clearly the author's meaning. We never asked for criticisms of style or for "appreciations," and they almost never came unsought. The student who is really getting a glimpse into the meaning of an author is usually too busy to prattle about style.

In all such work the business of the teacher is to be a good audience—tactful, interested, widely appreciative, and intelligently critical. No one can write without an audience and the success of the composition teacher depends almost entirely on his ability in this rôle. He must be interested in the student's point of view,

and must be able to make his students believe in that interest. One of the best ways of criticizing a theme in conference is to ask the student questions about it: What did you mean here? What would you say to this idea? Would that other one disprove your point? etc. Such a conference will show the student how far he has succeeded, wherein he has failed, and will give him a notion as to how to improve his work better than most formal criticism. Teaching of this kind demands that the instructor have time to read his themes carefully and to think about them, without which most composition work is useless.

With the other conditions right, the whole success of a course in English composition depends upon getting the student to take pains. Unless he is careful to do his best, no teaching will avail him much: if he is he can solve most difficulties for himself. A few grammatical forms and usages must be learned, but most mechanical difficulties are not really mechanical but logical. The construction of a sentence is purely a matter of thinking, punctuation is the

same, so the paragraphing, and the choice of words is not a matter of knowing good from bad, correct from incorrect, but rather a matter of the meaning you want to express or, as we say, of the effect you wish to produce. Usage tells one not what word to use and what one to avoid, but what each word means in the fullest sense. Given a student who has a meaning and who is willing to take pains to express his meaning, it is easy to do the rest. He will not take pains unless he has a meaning; in other words, he must have a subject upon which he can say something worth while. And he will not take pains unless he has an appreciative and critical audience; there lies the teacher's duty. So that this matter of taking pains involves a good deal more than haranguing the students upon the necessity of it once a term or once a week. It is really a matter of getting the other conditions right.

When the student is hard at work upon an intelligible and important task he will see the truth of a good many principles which he will otherwise assent to only because he is bullied.

For instance, that his style should attract as little attention as possible, that he should not "cover his meaning with a veil of words." I wonder at the artlessness with which I have heard that principle expounded in a course the whole aim of which was the study of words with no jot of attention ever given to any question of meaning. Set clearly at the task of saying something, given credit for that and not for mere juggling with words, the student will learn to write as well as he ought. His themes will have as much force and individuality as he has himself. If he is not a user of words, that also will honestly appear, as it ought. He will come after a while to the point where improving his writing will mean improving his moral and intellectual character—and there the university has its task. Most students have reached that point when they enter, and only theme work which is training in thinking will do them any good whatever. In all these matters teachers are too often afraid to face the real problem—that of educating the man—and instead try to plaster him over and cover him up with a super-

ficial glibness and cleverness with words—civilization from the outside instead of from within—which false theory is responsible for the failure not merely of much of the work in English composition, but of much of our university training.

VII

THE CORRELATION OF LITERATURE AND COMPOSITION¹

I

A VERY significant and apparently a very wide-spread change is taking place at the present time in the teaching of English composition in our colleges and universities. That study is becoming more and more what, in my opinion, it ought to be—a study of ideas rather than merely of words. From barren preoccupation with words to the exclusion of thought our study of English composition has long been suffering, and we may congratulate ourselves on those signs of the times which indicate that the disorder is on the way to being cured. Certainly composition teachers are active enough in the search for the medicine of ideas necessary to

¹ *English Journal*, November, 1914.

cure it. In all the sciences, in history and philosophy and religion, in educational theory, and in every phase of modern radical thought, men are seeking material for more lively and interesting exercises in the writing of English.

In my opinion this movement is destined to be the salvation of the study of English composition in this country, and I believe the day is not far distant when we shall be achieving for the first time in our universities a reasonable success in training our students to write their own language. But strong as is my enthusiasm for this idea of making our training in writing a training in thought, it seems to me important to call attention to one danger which may beset it.

The danger to which I allude is that of going too far afield in the search for ideas. The average instructor in English cannot be expected to teach his students to think about every subject under the sun, and if he tries to do so the result is certain to be superficial and valueless. It is easy enough, when one undertakes to put more

ideas into composition work, to ask the class to read an article on the Panama Canal or the child-labor problem and to get them to write about the subject with interest. Week after week such a programme can be carried out, and, if the subjects be varied enough, the interest of the class will continue. The result of such work will undoubtedly be to increase the undergraduate's fund of general information and to better his equipment for social conversation, but it will not be in any real sense training of the power to think, for the reason that the various lines of thought, once started, are not followed up. General information is not education, however frequently it may be mistaken for it. Thinking power is not to be got through smatterings but demands long application to one subject, turning it this way and that, tracing its implications in various directions. Herein lies the value, for the English teacher, of topics chosen from English literature. Topics of the sort I have just been deprecating are as truly thoughtful as would be Wordsworth's theory of the imagination or Arnold's conception of the

function of the critic, and it may be just as important (or more important) for us to know something about them, but they would become valuable material for education only when treated by a man able to trace his opinions back to fundamental facts and principles, and able to lead the class to do the same. The advantage of literary topics for the teacher of English is that he can follow them up and relate them to one another so that they lead in the end to the mastery of a connected body of thought. English composition could perhaps be taught effectively in connection with any subject in the curriculum, but only by a man competent to teach that subject.

Of course any instructor in English has (or ought to have) many general interests, and what has just been said is not intended to disparage the value of general information. Indeed, no man can teach either literature or science or philosophy in a liberal manner without making many excursions into the domains of other subjects, but his starting-place, his point of view, if his work is to make any deep and

clear-cut impression, must be that of his own.

My conclusion from all this is that instructors in English can teach their students to think and to write most effectively, not through the medium of essays on science or politics or philosophy, but through the medium of their own subject—English literature. It is here that they will find the ideas which it is their business to propagate, and which they can best use in their work of training their students to think on paper. Of course they must deal with science and philosophy and politics and foreign literature in order to make clear the bounds and nature of their own subject, but their point of departure will remain that of English literature. Their consideration of science or philosophy or politics will not make the work superficial because it will relate to the connected body of thought with which they are principally occupied and which their digressions only illustrate and clarify. Thus in connection with his own subject the teacher of English literature can best train his students to think, and for this reason I ad-

vocate the correlation of English literature and English composition.

II

This correlation of English literature and English composition makes certain demands upon the literary course which cannot be ignored. It will be pretty hard to teach English composition effectively in connection with a survey course in the history of English literature from the ninth century to the present. In such a course (as usually taught, at any rate) the principal demand upon the student is one of memory. Now the essential thing in training a student to write is to train him to think, and the study of composition can be carried on effectively only in connection with a literary course which makes upon him the same demand for thought. The value of literature as a stimulus to thought, its educative value, lies in its meaning rather than in its history. In his *Three Months of Teaching in the United States*, Professor Gustave Lanson goes to the heart of the matter when he criticizes us for the neglect of this principle.

“In all the branches of American education,” he says, in an extract quoted in the *New York Times*, “there is a lack of that exercise which among us Frenchmen is fundamental and is known as ‘the explanation of texts.’ Even in the study of the mother-tongue this is not practiced. Students in my course have told me that they have never had explained to them any piece of text except for the purpose of determining the sense in which the words were used, or for the study of matters relating to the history of the language and grammatical rules. That one should be expected to leave the literal meaning and rise to the examination of the ideas, their cohesion and their value, to the æsthetic analysis of the form and the comprehension of the agreement which unites the ideas to the form—that the explanation of a page of French should consist first of all in getting a distinct consciousness of our personal reaction from the reading of it, and that, from there, one should succeed in determining the historical significance of a literary epoch or get acquainted with the psychology of a writer—all these were things of which they had no idea, which they had never practiced. All the students told me so, and all the professors confirmed it.”

When one speaks of getting hold of the thought of a poem, the word “thought” is of course used in a wide sense: it includes that

form of intense feeling in which emotion becomes a source of illumination. To study literature with this aim is not to make it hard, narrow, and expository; it is not to consider poetry as a versification and illustration of the Ten Commandments; it is not to close one's eyes and heart to the pleasure which men have always found in it. A large part, perhaps the best part, of the knowledge which we live by and act on comes through the feelings and the imagination rather than through the reasoning faculty alone. Literature is a storehouse of such knowledge, and my point is that composition work can be done effectively in connection with literature (by young students, at any rate) only in a course the first aim of which is to get hold of this illumination which it is the end of great literature to give—that illumination of the mysteries of life which brings to intelligent human beings the highest form of pleasure.

In my own opinion this should be the end of all study of literature, and especially of the elementary course. Work of this kind forms the best introduction to an extended study of

literature because it gives the student some inkling of the nature of the thought with which he is to be occupied, and for the same reason it is the best training for the student whose formal study of literature is to end with the elementary course. For the English "major" and for the general student alike, the first thing to do is to give them some notion of the meaning of literature, of the illumination which they may hope to get from it.

Such a course will introduce the student to a world of new ideas, which, though hard to understand, will be to him in the highest degree interesting. It will be absolutely essential to his grasp of these ideas that he express himself about them, and thus the material is ready at hand for the most vital and effective training in English composition. Themes on subjects from his reading (if the reading is looked at in the thoughtful manner I have just indicated) will have for him the same eager interest that themes on the external aspects of daily life and sports have for the high-school boy. And writing on the matters about which he is reading

and thinking will form an indispensable aid to the success of his study of literature.

III

In an elementary course which the writer superintended for four years, such a plan as that outlined was followed, and it proved most effective, both for literature and for composition. The course began with some consideration of the ends of education and of the place and value of literature in it. Following this came a discussion of the relation of literature to science, and of both to education. The classes then studied four or five English poets, attempting in each case to see what it was that the man had to say, what was the illumination which he intended to convey to his readers, and attempting to put into words some individual reaction to these ideas. In other words, the student was asked to estimate for himself the value toward his own education of the ideas which the poet had to offer him. A certain amount of biography and literary history was required, but everything else was subordinated to this

study of the ideas of the authors read. The freshmen wrote each week on one of the many problems which came up in the study, sometimes merely restating an author's meaning, sometimes commenting on it. The best of them (I think I could say the majority) wrote and talked on such subjects with eagerness, and for them literature became something full of interest and meaning. They did not solve all the problems they attempted, but they made advancement. The work from beginning to end had connection; one idea had its bearing on another, so as to teach them to think in a way that the consideration of a large number of separate, unconnected subjects, however interesting, would not. It was my experience in this course which assured me of the value of the correlation of literature and composition, provided the composition is correlated with a thoughtful course in literature. It convinced me also that the approach to literature from the point of view of the thought it contains is infinitely more productive of good results than approaching it from the point of view of its history or its form.

In the course which I have just mentioned we had impressed on us two or three practical points which may be worth mentioning in conclusion. The first and most important of these is the necessity of limiting the theme subject. A young student will not write effectively about his reading if he is given a chapter or a book to summarize; he will only be disheartened by his failure to perform a task which he and his teacher might have realized would be for him impossible. On the other hand, if he is given one point to expand and explain in terms of his own experience, he has a task which demands real thought and which he can perform successfully. For example, the average undergraduate would make a hopeless failure if he attempted to sum up in a single essay the point of Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus* or even of Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey." He would be likely, on the other hand, to make a good essay (or at least learn something in the attempt) in explanation of a single phrase or passage—"church clothes," or

A presence that disturbs me with the joy
Of elevated thoughts.

And his explanation of one phrase will usually show his understanding or misunderstanding of a whole book or author.

A second point is the necessity of avoiding "infant criticism." The secret of doing this is to keep before the student the importance, first of all, of understanding the meaning of what he reads, of giving his mind up to that before he begins to comment on it. And then, when he does make comments of his own, let him explain what a certain idea is worth to him as an individual. If he keeps to that point of view his comment will be an explanation of his own thought and it will be real, full of life and meaning, instead of being the dull repetition of stock phrases which is the ordinary result of the freshman's attempt to write a critical essay.

In the third place, it is important both for the teacher and for the student to remember that the function of work of this kind is to open problems, rather than to solve them. A sentence

of Lionel Johnson's about Pater seems to me to put in a few words one of the most important characteristics of the real thinker. Of Pater's freedom from pedantry, of the exactness of his thought which is the secret of distinction, Johnson says: "He respected the universe, and neither optimists nor pessimists do that." One aim of such a study of literature is to show students the difficulty of solving some problems, to teach them respect for literature and for the universe. If we teach them to put this respect into their writing, to say what they have to say with that care and nicety which is born of the desire to tell the truth, we shall teach them to write with distinction.

VIII

ROBERT LOUIS STEVENSON DARKENING COUNSEL¹

I

IN one of the most charming of all his personal essays—on “A College Magazine”—Robert Louis Stevenson outlines what is ordinarily called, in the oil-tainted slang of the composition class, the “sedulous ape” theory of learning to write. Plainly and clearly and with just enough detail, he tells us how he did it.

“Whenever I read a book or a passage that particularly pleased me, in which a thing was said or an effect rendered with propriety, in which there was either some conspicuous force or some happy distinction in the style, I must sit down at once and set myself to ape that quality. I was unsuccessful, and I knew it; and tried again, and was again unsuccessful and always unsuccessful; but at least in these vain bouts, I got some practice in rhythm, in har-

¹ *English Journal*, June, 1912.

mony, in construction, and the coördination of parts. I have thus played the sedulous ape to Hazlitt, to Lamb, to Wordsworth, to Sir Thomas Browne, to Defoe, to Hawthorne, to Montaigne, to Baudelaire, and to Obermann. I remember one of these monkey tricks, which was called *The Vanity of Morals*: it was to have had a second part, *The Vanity of Knowledge*; and as I had neither morality nor scholarship, the names were apt; but the second part was never attempted, and the first part was written (which is my reason for recalling it, ghostlike, from its ashes) no less than three times: first in the manner of Hazlitt, second in the manner of Ruskin, who had cast on me a passing spell, and third, in a laborious pasticcio of Sir Thomas Browne. So with my other works: *Cain*, an epic, was (save the mark!) an imitation of *Sordello*: *Robin Hood*, a tale in verse, took an eclectic middle course among the fields of Keats, Chaucer, and Morris: in *Monmouth*, a tragedy, I reclined on the bosom of Mr. Swinburne; in my innumerable gouty-footed lyrics, I followed many masters; in the first draft of *The King's Pardon*, a tragedy, I was on the trail of no lesser man than John Webster; in the second draft of the same piece, with staggering versatility, I had shifted my allegiance to Congreve, and of course conceived my fable in a less serious vein—for it was not Congreve's verse, it was his exquisite prose, that I admired and sought to copy. Even at the age of thirteen I had

tried to do justice to the inhabitants of the famous city of Peebles in the style of the *Book of Snobs*. So I might go on forever, through all my abortive novels, and down to my later plays, of which I think more tenderly, for they were not only conceived at first under the bracing influence of old Dumas, but have met with resurrections: one, strangely bettered by another hand, came on the stage itself and was played by bodily actors; the other, originally known as *Semiramis: a Tragedy*, I have observed on bookstalls under the *alias* of *Prince Otto*. But enough has been said to show by what arts of impersonation, and in what purely ventriloquial efforts I first saw my words on paper."

According to that clear and definite method we have, in this country, built up a great study of English composition. Thousands of teachers, using thousands of volumes of carefully selected Models of Style, directed by thousands of textbooks on Composition and the Art of Writing (compendiums of analyzed and codified imitation), are at work, teaching the American youth how to write. It is not all based on Stevenson of course. He is not the only "sedulous ape" in literature who has confessed, but he is the

arch-example. No author is so frequently quoted to the aspiring high-school student or the sulky freshman. Now and then the long-tried undergraduate rebels. I have heard of a big sophomore composition class at Harvard which finally came to the point where they would stamp whenever Stevenson's name was mentioned, as at the mention of the ladies or of Yale.

And yet, though we make the undergraduates imitate even to stamping, somehow it does not work. They do not learn to write. A certain kind of result we do obtain—a colorless, standardized, uninteresting product, far enough removed from good writing. Can it be that Stevenson was wrong; or is it that we do not follow him properly? Perhaps it might moderate our expectations and account for some of our failures if we realized more clearly than we do a few facts about Stevenson's character and attainments in the years 1867-73 (when he was in the heat of his aping)—facts which he does not tell us in the essay, but which are necessary to any understanding of what he was doing,

and which may shed some light on the propriety of recommending his example to our freshman students. Incidentally this inquiry may throw a somewhat different light upon Stevenson's personality.

First of all it is worth while to direct our attention to the extent and thoroughness of his reading, as shown merely in the list of authors whom he imitated: Hazlitt, Lamb, Wordsworth, Sir Thomas Browne, Defoe, Hawthorne, Montaigne, Baudelaire, Obermann, Ruskin, Browning, Keats, Chaucer, Morris, Swinburne, John Webster, Congreve, Thackeray, Dumas. "So I might go on forever," he says. He has gone far enough to indicate that he was then an individual with reading not merely wider than that of the typical freshman to whom we commend his example, but wider than that of the ordinary graduate from our literary courses.

And this reading had not been done superficially, but, instead, with care and enthusiasm and appreciation enough to give him definite ideas about the style of these various authors—not an achievement of industry merely, but of

genius as well. Only a certain measure of genius could give a man motive and energy for such industry. All through his boyhood and youth, he tells us, his passion was to learn to write: to this end he bent all his powers; he had little time for anything else and was content to be thought an idler while he worked at this.

However, imitation did not give him his style. He says it did, but he unsays it in the same paragraph. What it did was to give him command of his tools, familiarize him with various cadences, bring legions of words swarming to his call, put him into the best position to work out a style of his own. His later writings show few direct influences of his masters. One can rarely say, here he is imitating Lamb, here Defoe, here Sir Thomas Browne. Whatever he learned from others, his mature style is his own. The one thing which he got from his training, and which he never lost, is a certain self-consciousness, not exactly a blemish and yet not a merit, which is absent only from his letters--a fact which seems to me to explain why it is

that many readers find the letters the most charming of all his work.

I do not wish to be understood as condemning Stevenson for what I have called his literary consciousness. One finds it in most writers who have read widely and admired what they have read. It is a form of humility and has the loveliness of that virtue, along with its danger of perversion into something stagnant and unreal. And besides he did not get all of his words and all of his cadences from books. The person who reads one of Stevenson's essays with a foreigner who does not know English very well will be amazed at the number of colloquial phrases, smacking of the soil, which will cause the foreigner to stumble. He was too human to allow imitation to make him very bookish. Stevenson steered the course with success: let him who would follow be sure that he has taken pains to be born at least as original.

II

As a matter of fact, Stevenson's "sedulous ape" period was a period of careful reading and

thinking, and it seems to me that the benefit he got from it is that which a student is likely to get from a course in literature rather than from a course in composition conducted according to the Models-of-Style and Art-of-Writing plan. He widened his vocabulary and studied words and cadences by seeing them used. True, he impressed them upon his mind by his imitations, but, were it not irreverent, I should suggest that he did "by that much, too much." At any rate the reading was the important thing—a fact which imitators of Stevenson, whether aspiring writers or aspiring teachers of others how to write, are prone to overlook.

Another fact about this reading is important. He did not study a series of extracts, selected as models of style. He searched out books for himself, not what was famous merely, but what had meaning for him. That his interests were individual and intelligent, that he had ideas, that he was a thinker, is shown clearly enough by the books he read. The list I gave does not fairly represent his range nor his depth. Let the skeptical person glance at his *Familiar*

Studies of Men and Books, or the essay on "Books Which Have Influenced Me," or, still better, read the *Letters*. The finest result of his years of imitation is, in my opinion, not what he learned about writing but what he learned about reading. There is one paragraph in his essay on "Books Which Have Influenced Me" which every student of literature ought to get by heart and profit by:

"The gift of reading, as I have called it, is not very common, nor very generally understood. It consists, first of all, in a vast intellectual endowment—a free grace, I find I must call it—by which a man rises to understand that he is not punctually right, nor those from whom he differs absolutely wrong. He may hold dogmas; he may hold them passionately; and he may know that others hold them but coldly, or hold them differently, or hold them not at all. Well, if he has the gift of reading, these others will be full of meat for him. They will see the other side of propositions and the other side of virtues. He need not change his dogma for that, but he may change his reading of that dogma, and he must supplement and correct his deductions from it. A human truth, which is always very much a lie, hides as much of life as it displays. It is men who hold another truth,

or, as it seems to us, perhaps, a dangerous lie, who can extend our restricted field of knowledge, and rouse our drowsy consciences. Something that seems quite new, or that seems insolently false or very dangerous, is the test of a reader. If he tries to see what it means, what truth excuses it, he has the gift, and let him read. If he is merely hurt, or offended, or exclaims upon his author's folly, he had better take to the daily papers; he will never be a reader."

To me Stevenson is most wonderful as a reader. I know of nothing finer than the enthusiasm, the sympathy, and the gusto of his enjoyment of books. He enjoyed everything. He almost never spoke ill of a book except in some official pronouncement like an article for the *Encyclopedia Britannica*, when he was overawed by his surroundings and did not feel free to speak his mind. Catch him off his guard and he will find something to praise, something to be grateful for, in every book he reads. And the height of his enthusiasm for reading he felt during the time when he was playing the "sedulous ape." In a letter written twenty years later he looks back with longing on the

joy of those reading days. Speaking of a book which he had just finished, he says: "I have enjoyed this book as I—almost as I—used to enjoy books when I was going twenty—twenty-three; and these are the years for reading." He did not read solely for the purpose of playing the "sedulous ape."

During those years he was thinking things out for himself, which is the one motive to make a young man with blood in his veins and the world stirring about him become a reader of books. Graham Balfour describes Stevenson's state of mind over and over again. I quote one passage, which will do as well as any, from the chapter dealing with the years 1867-73:

"He had begun to work out for himself his own views of life: his religion and his ethics, his relation to society and his own place in the universe. He was following out the needs of his mind and nature: strictly sincere with himself, he could never see things in their merely conventional aspect. He was 'young in youth,' and travelling at the fiery pace of his age and temperament; his senses were importunate, his intellect inquiring, and he must either find his own way, or, as he might well have done, lose it altogether."

Stevenson tells us, in various essays, a good deal about what he calls this "green sickness" of his youth, his eager curiosity to understand something of the mystery that confronts us all—the malady of thought which beset him then as sometime or other it besets every living man. Some men solve the problem by manual work (as Stevenson often wished he could), some manage to forget it by making a noise, and some by lotus-eating comfort. Stevenson found the way out by reading and thinking. In "Old Mortality," one of the essays in *Memories and Portraits*, he writes of exactly this thing:

"Books were the proper remedy: books of vivid human import, forcing upon their minds the issues, pleasures, busyness, importance and immediacy of that life in which they stand; books of smiling or heroic temper, to excite or to console; books of large design, shadowing the complexity of that game of consequences to which we all sit down, the hanger-back not least."

It was this curiosity—this wonder about things—which made him a reader, and it is his thought about life, not merely his mastery of

words and cadences, which gives him what greatness he has as a writer. We speculate a good deal about the reasons why our students do not read. As a matter of fact some of them do read; the others do not for the same reason that they ought not to write. They are not wondering about life, they are not working things out for themselves, they are satisfied with conventional beliefs of other men's making, and are principally interested in something quite different—namely, what they call getting on in the world. So long as they remain thus, they will not read books without being told to, and will not understand the ones they do read, and their writing will be—what it is at present.

Stevenson was a thinker, as was every other literary man of importance. He had ideas to express—not one or two or half a dozen but many. His imitators usually overlook all this and do not realize that there is a kind of blasphemy against the universe in trying to teach students to write who themselves have nothing to say.

The very record of his attempts as a "sedulous ape"—which has done so much harm by being made the basis of our false theory that a man may learn to write without having anything to say—that very record bears striking witness to the exuberance of Stevenson's ideas. A discourse upon the *Vanity of Morals*, another planned upon the *Vanity of Knowledge*, novels, epics, tragedies, satires, and lyrics without number bear witness to no ordinary fertility of mind. One specimen, "The Old Scotch Gardener," reprinted from a college magazine, shows keen thoughtful observation, a good deal of reading woven into the very texture of the man's thought, and a fine appreciation of human values, which is after all the best and most illuminating part of all his works. "They were not wit so much as humanity," says Mr. Edmund Gosse of Stevenson's jokes. No criticism of his works is truer of them than this would be, paying his style the very high compliment of ignoring it altogether. In his later writings when he speaks of style it is likely enough to be in the manner of the sentences following,

with all his attention concentrated on getting said what he has to say, the *what* being the important matter. (He is speaking of his article called "Roads"): "It is quite the best thing I have ever done, to my taste. There are things expressed in it far harder to express than in anything else I ever had; *and that, after all, is the great point.* As for style, *ça viendra peut-être.*" And in the most mechanical of all his utterances upon the subject, in an essay where he pretends that the whole matter is one of a conjurer juggling two oranges, and that the performance may be pleasing enough even though one of them is rotten, occurs a sentence like the following, which shows that he did not forget (as some promulgators of his gospel of imitation do) that after all a writer's principal business is to say something. "And, on the other hand, no form of words must be selected, no knot must be tied among the phrases, unless knot and word be precisely what is wanted to forward and illuminate the argument; *for to fail in this is to swindle in the game.*"

III

We allow Stevenson to darken counsel for us in this matter of learning to write because we misunderstand and misrepresent him. Misreading his story of his own experiences, we have built up a system of teaching which does not work because it is based on principles eternally false. We have overlooked the facts and misapplied his theories in the pseudo-scientific manner characteristic of our present-day study of the arts, to our own confusion. The facts we overlook are these: that Stevenson was a man filled with that energy and enthusiasm in the pursuit of his calling which we term genius; that he was a wide and intelligent reader; that his mind teemed with ideas; and that learning to write with him meant learning to say clearly, and therefore honestly, what he had to say. Ignoring all these facts we try to apply his method without discrimination to our undergraduates and high-school students who, for the most part, are neither readers nor thinkers, who have little to say, who

have little desire to learn to write and no excuse for writing, and who need first of all to have their interests stimulated and broadened, to be taught to think and to read, rather than to be burdened with countless and wearisome exercises in the expression of such poor ideas as they have or can borrow. We have taken the plan which served the purposes of this brilliant Scotsman and tried to apply it to the whole American people, whose purposes it will not serve, and we are surprised that failure is the result.

Many years after his "sedulous ape" period, when Stevenson had learned his trade and was growing famous, he said exactly the thing about this matter of learning to write that I have been trying to make clear. When he was once for some reason in Auckland, New Zealand, a newspaper reporter asked him what training he would advise for the young man who wished to learn to write. Stevenson's answer is published in the tenth chapter of *Stevensoniana*. It was, in three words, "read, read, read." He advised not modern works, but those of the older English

authors and the classics—good solid reading to be studied for the subject-matter. I quote a few sentences:

“If a young man wishes to learn to write English [said Mr. Stevenson] he should read everything. I qualify that by excluding the whole of the present century in a body. People will read all that is worth reading out of that for their own fun. If they read the seventeenth century and the eighteenth century; if they read Shakespeare and Thomas Browne, and Jeremy Taylor and Dryden’s prose, and Samuel Johnson—and, I suppose, Addison, though I never read him myself—and browse about in all the authors of those two centuries, they will get the finest course of literature there is. . . .”

He goes on to mention more solid reading and ends with the classics.

I am not maintaining that ideas are sufficient to make a writer. I am only contending that they are the first requisite, that you cannot make a writer, nor even begin to make one, without them, and that the attempt to do so warps the view of everyone concerned, makes them unconsciously tend to look upon literature as a matter of juggling words and the power of

writing something to be gained by any man who will take the trouble, without respect to the caliber or furnishings of his mind. As a matter of fact literature is one form of thought, and the important thing in the writer is his insight or vision—his power to think and to see. If he have this, it is important for him and for everyone else that he take infinite pains, spend his whole lifetime, in trying to express his thoughts, in order that he may teach his fellows truly and fully, not falsely and partly, what he has to impart. But if he have not the vision, let him hold his peace. We lose our respect for the verities of life by attempting the impossible.

I have chosen to base my contention in regard to Stevenson upon those utterances of his which are usually, it seems to me, misinterpreted. His other writings leave no possible doubt as to his position. His essay on "The Morality of the Profession of Letters" is one long sermon on this subject.

"There are two duties incumbent upon any man who enters on the business of writing: truth to the fact and a good spirit in the treatment.

In every department of literature, though so low as hardly to deserve the name, truth to the fact is of importance to the education and comfort of mankind, and so hard to preserve, that the faithful trying to do so will lend some dignity to the man who tries it. . . . Those who write have to see that each man's knowledge is, as near as they can make it, answerable to the facts of life; that he shall not suppose himself an angel or a monster; nor take this world for a hell; nor be suffered to imagine that all rights are concentrated in his own caste or country, or all veracities in his own parochial creed. . . . Every fact is a part of that great puzzle we must set together; and none that comes directly in a writer's path but has some nice relations, unperceivable by him, to the totality and bearing of the subject under hand. . . . And for a last word: in all narration there is only one way to be clever, and that is to be exact. To be vivid is a secondary quality which must presuppose the first; for vividly to convey a wrong impression is only to make failure conspicuous."

The writer sets himself up as a teacher and is responsible, first of all, for seeing the truth and for telling it.

"An author who has begged the question and reposes in some narrow faith cannot, if he would, express the whole or even many of the sides of

this various existence; for, his own life being maim, some of them are not admitted in his theory, and were only dimly and unwillingly recognized in his experience. Hence the smallness, the triteness, and the inhumanity in works of merely sectarian religion; and hence we find equal although unsimilar limitation in works inspired by the spirit of the flesh or the despicable taste for high society. So that the first duty of any man who is to write is intellectual. Designedly or not, he has so far set himself up for a leader of the minds of men; and he must see that his own mind is kept supple, charitable, and bright."

We think too little, in our miscellaneous endeavors to teach the art of writing, of what a misfortune it would be if we could really do what we attempt. We do not consider what harm would be done, what endless possibilities for misleading the nation we should open up, could we give every narrow, superficial, misguided aspirant "the power of speech to stir men's blood." We cannot; the danger is avoided; but we have not the grace to be thankful.

The whole essay from which I have just been quoting is full of Stevenson's sense of the re-

sponsibility of the writer, of the importance of his doing his work well, seeing the truth and telling it, not for the sake of the power or the pay, but for the sake of righteousness.

“Here, then, is work worth doing and worth trying to do well. And so, if I were minded to welcome any great accession to our trade, it should not be from any reason of a higher wage, but because it was a trade which was useful in a very great and in a very high degree; which every honest tradesman could make more serviceable to mankind in his single strength; which was difficult to do well and possible to do better every year; which called for scrupulous thought on the part of all who practiced it, and hence became a perpetual education to their nobler natures; and which, pay it as you please, in the large majority of the best cases will still be underpaid.”

When we have acquired some such respect for the business of writing, we shall follow a different method in attempting to teach it. We shall see things in their true proportion, shall understand that a man has no call to write unless he has something to say, cannot learn otherwise, and ought not. We shall spend more time teaching our students to think, ask them

to write less and that more thoughtfully. And when we find a student with ideas we shall not lower our standard of adequate expression, but rather raise it, and, attempting what is worth while and also possible, let us hope we shall have more success.

Misreading Stevenson has led us astray in the matter of English Composition, but the pity is not so much that we should get from him something that is false as that we should fail to get something that is true. To be flat wrong about a question is not so bad; it is only a matter of knocking against a fact or two and one is set right. But to miss something rare and illuminating, something that sheds a flood of light on work and on education—that is indeed a pity. That is what, it seems to me, many persons do in the case of Stevenson. They speak of the years of his training as if they were years spent with words, and nothing but words. As a matter of fact he was thinking—exploring the earth and the heavens above, trying it, not always finding it good, sometimes finding it utterly bad. “To believe in immortality,” he says

somewhere, "is one thing, but it is first needful to believe in life." He could not always believe in it, and he would not unless he could sincerely. A letter quoted by Balfour, written in 1878, from a noisy café in the Latin Quarter of Paris, to his father from whom he had become partially estranged, sums up, in a wild, incoherent way, the history of the struggle of these years. It is fragmentary and far from clear: when a man's soul is weary and his beliefs are slowly forming out of chaos, he does not express himself with clearness, force, and ease. Its very confusion is eloquent of his thought and difficulties during the years when he was restlessly and eagerly seeking for any light he could find on the mystery of life. He found at last what seemed light to him, he emerged from the darkness with a belief in life and a courage for it which has been equaled by few. His solution he worked out partly from men, more from books; and his essays on his reading, with his own story flashing out from every line, are full of enthusiasm and gratitude for what he learned from books. They are full of

the freshness which the world had for him again—not exactly the freshness of youth, but that perennial freshness which is felt by the thinker, by the man who has learned to wonder. No man knows the meaning of literature or science or philosophy until this wonder has dawned upon his soul: and it is so linked to the deepest and best in us that Carlyle could make it a definition of religion. It is no small thing but a very great one to know how to read books.

Here was a man who knew how to read, and for that more than for anything else, it seems to me, these youthful essays of his are worth while. One may not agree with his opinions; one has only to understand him to see that this does not matter. The question is not one of the “rank” of Congreve or of Dumas. It is a question of how to seize hold of one of the deep and enduring satisfactions of man’s life. To miss all this in Stevenson for the sake of petty word-mongering is to miss a fine and gracious account of the meaning of literature from a man who knew how to read.

IX

THE HISTORY OF ENGLISH AS A COLLEGE SUBJECT IN THE UNITED STATES ¹

THERE is a wide-spread feeling in the country, in colleges and technical schools alike, that our work in English does not produce the values that it ought. Our college and technical-school graduates are condemned in various quarters as being unable to write and speak their mother-tongue, although the men who agree in that condemnation would perhaps disagree violently in their conception of what is good writing and speaking. In the same way English work is pronounced a failure because

¹ This essay and the one following contain, in largely altered form, material first put together by me for the section on English in Dr. C. R. Mann's report on Engineering Education for the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. My thanks are due to Dr. Mann and to the Foundation for their kindness in allowing me to use this material in advance of their publication of it.

it does not produce the love of good reading, although there is the widest variety of opinion as to what constitutes good reading and why men should love it. This prevalent confusion of points of view in the critics is reflected by an equal confusion in the efforts of those who are undertaking to improve instruction in English. An extraordinary number of experiments are being tried, and the record of the results, in articles and text-books, is staggering in its bulk. The greater number of these experiments, like the criticisms which they answer, are concerned with matters of detail. The result is the invention of ingenious pedagogical tricks for doing this thing or that, which have their value, but which do not go to the heart of the matter.

This discussion, for better or for worse, follows a much simpler line. It is an attempt to determine, from the history of English as a college subject in this country, whether there is not something in the attitude with which we approach the subject, literature and composition alike, which is at the root of all our difficulties.

I

Our methods of treating English are a double inheritance from rhetoric and from the classics, and it seems pretty clear that the ineffectiveness of our study of English is due to precisely those methods which caused the study of rhetoric and of the classics in this country to decline. This will be evident if we look more closely at the two elements of this legacy. From 1800 to 1850, such study of English literature and composition as there was in our colleges was conducted by the professor of rhetoric. It was only after 1850, or rather after the Civil War, that English literature began rapidly to displace the classics, and it was during the last thirty years of the century that our present methods of dealing with it were evolved.

The first standard texts on rhetoric were those of Blair, Campbell, and Whateley. Hugh Blair's *Lectures on Rhetoric* were first published in 1783, just after he had resigned his professorship of Rhetoric and Belles-Lettres in the

University of Edinburgh. The lectures had been read for twenty-four years in the University, and they were enormously popular.¹ They had, the author alleges, been quoted in print from students' notes before they were published. They form a learned disquisition on the philosophy of style, the character of the beautiful and the sublime, the nature of language, and the virtues and defects incident to different species of writing. They are diffuse, copious, erudite, fastidious in style, instinct with classical culture, and written from the point of view of the literary standards of the eighteenth century. They contain a great many just observations and a great many more elegant platitudes. They formed a storehouse of opinions which students apparently learned up. A favorite way of editing them was to append to each chapter analyses and sets of questions. For instance, these questions in Mill's edition (1844), at the end of the fifth chapter, on "Beauty and Other Pleasures of Taste":

¹ The Boston Public Library contains what seem to be sixteen separate editions and twenty-four "abridgements," and yet lacks some editions, notably the first.

“Why was it necessary to treat of sublimity at some length?

“Why will it not be necessary to discuss, so particularly, all the other pleasures that arise from taste?

“Why are several observations made on beauty?

“Beauty, next to sublimity, affording the highest pleasure to the imagination, what is the nature of the emotion which it raises?”

These four questions, out of the fifty or sixty on this chapter, will be sufficient to make clear to any discriminating teacher the nature of the emotions which such work would raise in the breast of the pupil, and the nature of the illumination which it would give him.

Campbell's *Philosophy of Rhetoric*, 1776, printed and written a little earlier than Blair's, is a book of much the same character. Campbell was principal of Marischal College, Aberdeen, and was a friend of Blair's: his canons of taste are the same. Both Blair and Campbell, in true eighteenth-century fashion, make “correctness” their ideal. Both censure many details of the works of the best authors whom they use as illustrations. The tone of this censure

is curiously like the red-inked comments of their present-day descendants on the more modest productions of undergraduates. The ideal of correctness of the eighteenth century was an impossible and a sterile ideal; it strove for a correctness which never existed on sea or land. It was an attempt to cultivate taste by a negative process. And the same thing is true of the standards of many a present-day teacher of English composition.

Archbishop Whateley's *Elements of Logic*, 1826, and *Elements of Rhetoric*, 1828, expanded from articles which he contributed to the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* some years before, vied with Blair and Campbell in popularity in American colleges during the first half of the nineteenth century. Whateley was at Oriel College, Oxford, in the days of Copleston, Davison, and Newman. His work contains more sound sense perhaps than Blair's or Campbell's, and tends somewhat more to a practical point of view. Rhetoric to Whateley is less a philosophy and more a practical art, always in danger of degenerating into a collection of juggler's tricks;

he discusses the danger of putting these tricks into the possession of the wicked, who may use them to deceive. His conclusion is, however, that publicity will guard the public against this danger, a wide-spread knowledge of the art being the surest protection against the illegitimate practice of it.

These three texts were in well-nigh universal use in American colleges and universities before 1850. The classes recited from their textbooks the principles of style and of criticism,¹ and from four to eight times a year each student produced a theme or an oration. Apparently not much writing was required in college outside these formal set theses, except where essays were written or speeches prepared for literary and debating societies. So far as instruction went, the undergraduates had immense quantities of principle and very little practice. The lack of formal practice may have been a good thing on the whole, as leaving less danger of the undergraduate's forming habits of stilted

¹ "The Sophomores recited twice a week from Campbell's *Rhetoric*, during the First Term."—*Catalogue of Harvard College*, 1850.

self-conscious writing; as it was they grew up apparently pretty unscathed by rhetoric to learn to express themselves naturally in their literary societies and in personal letters. When we look back with admiration at the elegance with which our grandfathers wrote, we are inclined perhaps to give too much credit to the formal instruction they received and too little to their flourishing literary societies.

In 1854 G. P. Quackenbos (author of *First Lessons in Composition*, 1851, of which it is said 40,000 copies were sold) supplemented these classic works with his *Advanced Course of Composition and Rhetoric*. It is a compendious treatise, including in its five parts a history of the language, a guide to punctuation, a rhetoric, a section on composition or invention, and one on prosody. It presents all the old abstractions about the beauties of language in condensed textbook form, together with an immense number of more seemingly practical facts and rules. It contains many more suggestions for exercises than the earlier books, but these are of that artificial nature apparently inevitable in works de-

voted to the study of words rather than matter.
For instance:

“A DESCRIPTIVE LETTER—*Dated Niagara Falls.*

- I. Acknowledge receipt of a friend's letter, and offer to give an account of a summer tour which you are supposed to have taken.
- II. Preparations for leaving home.
- III. Incidents on the way to Niagara.
- IV. General remarks on the pleasures, fatigues, and advantages of travelling.
- V. Description of the Falls and the surrounding places.
- VI. Comparisons with any other scene.
- VII. Emotions awakened by sublime scenery.
- VIII. General remarks about returning, and the anticipated pleasure of rejoining friends.”

That exercise and the five hundred and sixty-five others of its like in the *Advanced Course* were destined to point the way for rhetoric for a generation. The subject became, as in this book, more practical in a sense, but at the same time more artificial. In addition to the exposition of abstract principles of style, it became the rule to provide concrete exercises for show-

ing the working of these principles in action; only the fact was ignored that men do not write to illustrate principles of style, and that whatever is written for that purpose, even if successful, is useless for any other.

During the fifties and sixties, the number of manuals slowly increased, and during the seventies they increased very rapidly. The names of Bascom, Day, Haven, J. S. Hart, Bain, Hunt, Hill, Genung, and Wendell are a kind of history of the subject. We need not attempt the difficult and delicate task of commenting on the character and merits of these books one by one. In general the later treatises are shorter, abler, more sound and sensible, and more practical than the earlier ones. They eliminate the effusive piety, the shaky linguistic theories, and the girls'-finishing-school exercises of books like that of Quackenbos. But they are constantly concerned with the form of thought rather than the substance, and hence the tendency toward artificiality in their results with the average beginner.

Whateley says, in the preface to his work,

that while those who have already formed their style may not find his book of any particular interest or value, he hopes that it will prove of worth to those who have yet to develop the power of writing. He might more reasonably have hoped the opposite. While abstract principles of style are worth little and mean little to the beginner, they are both interesting and instructive to the practiced writer, and that remark will be found true of the whole series of books here considered. They contain sound sense, elegant and discerning thought, and fine and lofty ideals of the art of writing, but all these have been practically wasted on the thousands of elementary students who have been drilled in their precepts as a means of learning to write.

In this discussion I have omitted works on logic, like Whateley's and Thomson's, which were often, especially in the earlier half of the century, studied in rhetoric classes. The two subjects, rhetoric and logic, were very properly linked together. They are similar in attitude and aim; and the *formal* study of them is equally

interesting to the practiced thinker and equally futile in the case of the elementary student.

While the impression given above of the divorce of rhetoric from thought is substantially correct, it is nevertheless true that now and then a textbook attempted to take the opposite line. T. W. Hunt's *Principles of Written Discourse*, 1884, is a remarkable example of this. It opens with an outline history (rather meager, it is true) of the rise and fall of rhetoric as a study, and points out clearly the tendency, which has existed from the days of the Sophists until now, to make it a study of words rather than of meanings. He sets for himself the task of again uniting form and content. The book is a valiant, if not quite successful, effort to resist the traditional organization of rhetorical ideas. But the main current flowed on in its old channel.

Alexander Bain, from 1860 to 1880 Professor of Logic and English at the University of Aberdeen, and author of an *English Composition and Rhetoric*, first published in 1866, which was a good deal used in American colleges, was extremely clear and outspoken in recommending

this divorce of writing from thinking to which the whole study of English composition tended. In the preface to the 1871 edition of the *Composition and Rhetoric*, he explains clearly his theory of the negative function of composition teaching,—pruning, correcting, disciplining the student's use of words. He doubts the value of original themes or essays as a training in composition: too much attention may be diverted to the matter. "The writing of Themes," he says, "involves the burden of finding matter as well as language; and belongs rather to classes in scientific or other departments, than to a class in English composition. The matter should in some way or other be supplied, and the pupil disciplined in giving it expression." He suggests, as a better exercise than themes, improving imperfect passages in old authors, converting poetry into prose, abridging and summarizing longer passages or expanding brief sketches.¹

In his little book *On Teaching English*, 1887, Bain develops this idea at greater length. "Care

¹ Bain, *English Composition and Rhetoric*, 1871, Preface, p. 6.

and correctness'' are the things for the composition instructor to teach. All mixed exercises, involving attention both to matter and form, or even to various qualities of style at one time, are bad. The only possible justification of themes is because ''we can find so little to do in expression proper, that we need to add to the work by throwing in a lesson of knowledge or of thought.'' ¹ That possibility he indignantly repudiates. He would organize and simplify the whole subject of composition beyond anything that has been attained so far, taking up one principle at a time, mastering it, and passing on to the next. The idea that a man's style is the expression of the whole man he implicitly denies. In this, as in all other subjects, he is distinctly opposed to reaping where he has not sown. He would deal with no ideas in the rhetoric class except those proceeding from the rhetoric teacher and the textbook. ''A learner should not be asked even to show off what he can do outside the teaching of the class. . . . If you depart ever so little

¹Bain, *On Teaching English*, p. 26.

from the principle of testing pupils on your own teaching, and on nothing beyond, you open the door for any amount of abuse.”¹

This is perhaps the frankest statement in the latter half of the nineteenth century of that belief in the separation of writing from thinking which has always been the danger of English composition. I do not mean to imply that Bain's extreme views were very widely accepted. A review of the book in the *Academy*, in 1887, criticizes it severely on just these grounds, but Bain makes only an extreme statement of the position which was implied in the current methods then and is to-day.

Since 1890 composition teaching has advanced rapidly from theory to practice. But the practice is really based on the old theory. Text-books on writing have been less and less used or have become more and more useful manuals of information needed by writers (advice on hard points of grammar, punctuation, usage, and arrangement of material, more or less like the indispensable “style books” issued by pub-

¹ Bain, *On Teaching English*, p. 27.

lishing houses), but the themes have continued to be written for the sake of practice rather than for the sake of saying something. Students are advised to *write, write, write*, when the advice they need is *think, think, think*. The required themes have increased in length and frequency until many undergraduates are compelled to produce in one course in a year an amount of writing which, if it were really to say anything, would tax the strength and fertility of most professional men of letters, even though they gave all their time to the work. This tendency has reached its climax in the daily theme. When the instructor requires an essay from each student every day he must of necessity be lenient as regards thought. Such work encourages glibness and facility and wordiness rather than sincerity and brevity and care. It tends inevitably to put the emphasis on words rather than on matter, and to divorce writing from thinking. Professor Phelps, of Yale, argues from his own experience that our undergraduates write quite as well without this stupendous amount of drudgery, and the author of this

paper would go so far as to say that the results are better.

II

The study of rhetoric, with its eighteenth-century standards of correctness in form and its eighteenth-century tendency to minimize the importance of the idea, its belief that

True wit is nature to advantage dress'd;
What oft was thought, but ne'er so well express'd,

was indirectly an inheritance from the Renaissance study of the classics. The influence of the study of the classics is more directly visible however in the teaching of English literature. The old professor of rhetoric was likely to be professor of *belles-lettres* as well, but his use of literature was mostly as an illustration of rhetorical effects. The classics were primarily the material for purely literary study. After the middle of the past century, English literature began gradually to displace the classics, during the sixties it became a full-fledged college subject, and in the seventies courses in English literature began to take on their present form.

English literature did not displace the classics without vigorous opposition. The common objection was that English was too easy; reading straight along what could be readily understood without the aid of grammar or dictionary was considered to be of very little value educationally, or, even if valuable, was something which the student might do as well by himself as with a teacher. In self-defense teachers of English felt called upon to prove that their subject was difficult, and to make it difficult in order to substantiate their proof, in both of which efforts they amply succeeded. The middle of the century was a period of great advance in English scholarship, and the newly heaped-up stores of knowledge were freely drawn upon to lend body and substance to the teaching of English literature. Old English was a ready resource; if not quite so hard and not quite so ancient as Latin, it was still both hard and old. The fact that the value of Old English literature was infinitesimal as compared with that of Latin or Greek was ignored. Old English (or Anglo-Saxon as it was generally called) was advocated

as the logical study with which to begin the English course and constituted in some colleges the work of the freshman year. In many places during the seventies and eighties, English literature later than Shakespeare or Milton was rarely studied. It was an age of productive scholarship in English studies as in science, and in both fields scholars taught what they were most interested in, emphasizing contributions to knowledge above the use of knowledge for the purposes of education. Now and then a scholar-like Child achieved both ends, but such men were rare.

There is no lack of evidence that the study of English literature was modeled closely on the study of the classics: all the educational writers of the time say so, and the college catalogues confirm it. For example, the following quotation from the catalogue of Columbia College in 1860. In the section devoted to Philosophy and English Literature, we are told that, "The latter half of the year is devoted to the critical study of an English classic, *treated in the same manner as an ancient*

classic is treated by a Professor of Ancient Languages, etc.”

Another example of the influence of the classical method on the study of English literature is a little book by F. A. March, who, in 1857, became professor of the English Language and Comparative Philology at Lafayette College. It is his *Method of Philological Study of the English Language*, 1865. The book is an imitation, as the author states in his preface, of a *Method of Classical Study*, 1861, by Samuel H. Taylor, Principal of Phillips Academy, Andover. Dr. Taylor's book prints a few short passages of Greek and Latin—five fables from the *Latin Reader*, a chapter from *Nepos*, a section of one of Cicero's orations, twenty-three lines from the *Æneid*, a chapter of the *Anabasis*, and thirty-two lines of the *Iliad*—with questions. The book is like the *Variorum Shakespeare* or the work on Magic which Merlin read,

every page having an ample marge,
And every marge enclosing in the midst
A square of text that looks a little blot . . .
And every margin scribbled, crost, and cramm'd
With comment, densest condensation, hard
To mind and eye,

except that in the place of comment we have questions,—a few on subject-matter, and hundreds on every detail of the construction and grammatical form of every word. March's book is an exactly similar treatment of a few short passages from Bunyan, Milton, Shakespeare, Spenser, and Chaucer. The total amount of the reading is insignificant; hardly enough is given from each author to make a connected impression or to offer the slightest difficulty to the understanding, but the questions are "hard to mind and eye." They demand of the young pupil first an immense number of facts about the life of the author and the literary history and sources of the work under discussion. Following this comes a series which involves a minute grammatical analysis of the selection sentence by sentence and the parsing of words, with special attention to the difficult forms of the verb. The first questions would not be unprofitable for a graduate class which had read and understood the work in question: the second part would not be unprofitable drill for a

class in grammar. But in no real sense is either a literary exercise.

Our copiously annotated school texts and the traditional method of using them are another expression of this point of view. A great deal of literary study became a study of notes rather than of texts, and the story is universal of the undergraduate who, not having time in preparation for an examination to read both text and notes, chose the latter to his profit. In classics the emphasis had somehow got shifted from literature to language, from literary training to grammatical discipline (a fact which has had more influence perhaps than any other in their decline), and this became true of the study of English literature. The whole matter was of course one of emphasis and degree: in any reading the student must understand the words before he can understand the meaning. And the more closely he reads, the more widely he grasps the significance of allusions, the more richly he understands the meaning of words and how they came to have their meanings, the more keenly he tastes the fine flavor of the language of an

author, and the more truly he understands what the author is trying to say. But this last is the important thing, all else is subservient to it, and this fact the student must also see or he will never see the true meaning of his work. Too much of the literary study of the last generation never got to literature.

If this historical account and my interpretation of it are sound, it would seem that the root of our troubles in English is that we have inherited an attitude toward the subject which has led us, both in literature and composition, to emphasize technique rather than thought. As a result, our courses in English literature have tended to stress the history of literature, the "evolution" of literary forms, the language, rather than the thought of the authors studied. It has often been said that every student of literature should be also either a historian or a philosopher. In this country we have tended to divorce literature from philosophy and from history, except for that unreal kind of history which we call the history of literature. The re-

sult is to leave our instruction thin, lacking in grip on human problems, in a very real sense of the word unliterary.

In like manner our instruction in composition has inherited from the study of rhetoric its preoccupation with form rather than content. We still tend to think it better for the student to write on easy subjects, which will not demand much thought, in order that he may put all his attention on the words he is using. We ask him to deal not so much with ideas as with "forms of discourse." We grade him not on what he says, but on how he says it.

It is of course to be admitted that we all know teachers whose work is an exception to this; no statement of a tendency can be true of every particular; but the foregoing pages describe with substantial accuracy the prevailing temper of our English work, both in colleges and technical schools. And that temper accounts for its ineffectiveness. This external point of view has been often enough denounced in our own literature. "The chief vices of education," says Ruskin, in his lecture on "Art and Morals,"

“have arisen from the one great fallacy of supposing that noble language is a communicable trick of grammar and accent, instead of simply the careful expression of right thought.” Our study of English has labored too much under that fallacy; it has fallen into what Bacon calls “the first distemper of learning, when men study words and not matter.”

X

THE PROBLEM OF ENGLISH IN ENGINEERING SCHOOLS ¹

THE problem of English in engineering schools is essentially the same as in colleges of liberal arts. The difficulties of the subject as it is taught to-day in the two classes of institutions are the same, and the virtues of the successful solution of the problem which we may hope for to-morrow will be due to the observance of the same principles in the one type of institution as in the other. Varying conditions will always call for modifications in detail, but the underlying values which our students should get from the study of English in every case are identical: power of clear thought and clear expression, appreciation of refined pleasure, and the possession of a broad and human outlook on life.

The purpose of this essay is to explain how

¹ See note to Essay IX.

we embody in practice at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology our tentative solution of this "problem of English" which I have stated in the foregoing paragraph. We do not teach "engineering English" or "business English" as those terms are generally understood. Instead we give our students, both in literature and composition, the best literary instruction we can, taking pains however at the beginning to give the men a chance to think out for themselves the importance in engineering education of the power of clear thinking and clear expression, and of the broad and human outlook which has always been recognized as the most important result of literary studies. We recognize frankly, it is true, that our students are engineers, that they desire, most of all, to attain success in engineering, that they are likely to feel at the start little interest in literature for its own sake, and that what they want in composition is to learn to write good business letters and engineering reports. But we do not assume that they will necessarily prefer a narrow success to a broad one, that just because

they have chosen to be engineers, all things human are alien to their interests. We do not ask our students to be ashamed of being engineers, but we do ask them to be ashamed of being narrow, one-sided engineers. We try to make them see, what engineering students and still more teachers of engineering are prone to forget, that the engineer is also a man.

All students at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology are required to do two years' work in English. There are further electives and in some courses an additional year or half-year is provided, but the two years are required of all. The first half of the freshman year is devoted to general composition, with the object of eliminating the commoner errors and those rhetorical superstitions about "introduction, body, and conclusion," etc., which make the writing of so many graduates of secondary schools hard, mechanical, and self-conscious. We try at the same time to lead the students to see that excellence in writing comes not so much from the negative virtue of avoiding errors in expression

as from the positive one of having something to say.

In the second half of the freshman year we undertake to lead the students to realize for themselves the place and value of English in engineering education. The sophomore year is then devoted to literature and to further work in composition, one half-year to each, though writing invariably forms a part of the work in literature and thoughtful reading a part of the work in composition. The course given in the second half of the freshman year, which I have called working out the place of English in an engineering education, I propose to describe more in detail.

In order that a student should have any clear ideas of the value of English to an engineer, it is first necessary that he have a clear conception of what he means by engineering, and we begin the work by asking him this question. We follow up his answer with other questions: What is the difference between a trade and a profession? What is the meaning of professional spirit? What should be the position of

the engineer in society in this new era of the manufacture of power, that of mechanical, hired expert, or that of leader and adviser? Is the function of the engineer to direct only the material forces of nature, or also human forces? Such questions readily arouse the interest of the students and bring on thoughtful discussion. The men are in earnest about their work and they are more than willing to be led to think worthily of it. When we have thus brought out in class a number of points of view on these questions, we ask the students to read one or two essays on the subject by engineers. In order that this material may be available, we have reprinted in a convenient volume selections from the works of prominent engineers, scientists, and literary men of the nineteenth century. These selections are arranged under the following heads: "Writing and Thinking," "The Engineering Profession," "Engineering Education," "Pure Science and Applied," "Science and Literature," and "Literature and Life." These headings will suggest the problems we discuss and their order. The reading

of the essays in each case arouses further discussion, to which we allow the utmost freedom. No orthodox point of view is prescribed; the student's own reason, not the opinion of his teacher or the pronouncement of his text, is the final authority. We do not try to urge the student into hasty, ill-considered judgments; our aim is to raise questions which it may take him half a lifetime to answer; our purpose is to give him a thoughtful outlook on life and on his profession.

Having discussed the question, What is engineering? we proceed to ask: What is the aim of engineering education? What kind of education will produce the ideal engineer? What is the relation between power of memory and power of thought? Is there any connection between a broad and liberal point of view and capacity for leadership? What qualities do practical engineers value most highly in technical graduates? Again we follow the discussion of these and related topics by asking the student to read essays, by engineers, on these subjects,—essays which will widen and stimulate his

thought so as to give him a broad and true, rather than a false and narrow conception of engineering education.

Following the question, What is the aim of engineering education? comes naturally: What is the relation of pure science to applied? and following that, What is the relation of science to literature? Here again, in each case, after the preliminary discussion in class, we ask the students to read essays by those men who have the best right to speak about these things—Huxley, Tyndall, Arnold, and Newman, for example. This material follows naturally the essays by engineers on engineering subjects. The students read it with the same keen interest, and in their written and oral discussion of what they have studied, they come to see for themselves the connection between engineering, with which they began, and literature, with which they end.

Such discussion and reading as I have described above fairly bristles with subjects for themes: differences of opinion between members of the class or criticisms of the essays read demand careful statement in writing before the

class can decide on their merits. Single points require elaboration and illustration; individuals are always eager to compare their own aims with those expressed in the class. These are all subjects in which the student takes the keenest interest, which involve the expression of intricate and complicated ideas, which demand that he weigh conflicting considerations and answer arguments; and they are subjects which he will do his best to treat in a clear and convincing manner. The questions which demand an answer are so numerous that many must be threshed out in class, and the work thus offers a profitable combination of writing and oral discussion.

The students' themes should be more than mere summaries of the essays they have read. They should embody, however modestly, some original thought. For example, instead of being asked merely to restate an author's answer to the question, What is engineering? the student should be asked to explain the difference between the work of some particular engineer and some mechanic whom he knows in the

flesh. In like manner, instead of being required to give the ideas of some writer on engineering education, the student should be asked to compare his own aims in going to college with those implied in the essay in question. Again, instead of trying to compete with Huxley or Arnold, in stating their views on literature and science, the student should undertake to define the issue between them. Another fruitful method of making themes show at once knowledge of the material studied, and some original thought applied to it, is to ask the class to expand or illustrate a single sentence or paragraph. Any class discussion which is really alive will supply subjects, more of them than can possibly be used. It is better that the topics should be taken thus, hot from the discussion, than that they should be planned beforehand and "given out," lukewarm or cold. It is not merely a man's own interest in a problem which makes him eager to do his best in writing on it; it is the interest which others feel in it as well. All real writing springs out of an atmosphere in which there is free interchange

of ideas. Given the ideas it is practically impossible to suppress the expression of them. The class will find the subjects if the teacher succeeds in making them think.

The interest of the students is best kept and stimulated by criticizing all this writing and speaking from the point of view of the idea, not of the form. Suggestions as to form must not be forgotten, but they must be kept subordinate, as indeed they are subordinate in importance. In practice we make them for the most part in individual conference. Most matters which are treated as questions of form are really questions of thought. It is our experience that much routine or formal instruction in composition and rhetoric tends rather to befuddle than to clarify the student's thinking. Most boys of college age have already learned and forgotten an immense number of rules about punctuation and grammar and sentence structure and paragraphing. Their weakness is that they have not learned to use them. There is only one way to acquire this knowledge, and that is by experience in expressing ideas that they are

keen to express, and keen to express adequately. Hence faults are best corrected by asking the writer first what he intended to say, and, second, whether the sentence or phrase in question really says it. When he is called to account in this way, the suggestion strikes home, and he is not likely to make the same mistake again, because he sees how it obscured the idea he was trying to make clear. Once the habit of self-criticism from the point of view of the idea is established, the student will make astonishing progress in the ability to express himself clearly and independently; he will gather hints from all sources; and in ways too complex for pedagogical analysis he will acquire such power over language as he is naturally fitted to possess. For the achievement of this complex end formal instruction in technique is entirely too crude and clumsy to be of more than incidental use.

A prime necessity for successful work of this character is unlimited opportunity for discussion. The class-room must be only secondarily a "recitation" room—a place for finding out whether or not the men have done the assigned

reading. It must be primarily a place for the development of ideas and points of view by discussion. The function of the instructor is not to lecture, not to pronounce upon what is wrong and what is right, but rather to lead and direct the discussion, to keep it on the main track, and to see that it is brought to a focus on the crucial points. If he expresses his own opinion, it should not be *ex cathedra*, but as a private individual. If he cannot tolerate, and even provoke, dissension from his own views, he should be required to confine himself to courses where his duty will be merely to dole out facts, and to avoid such work as this.

The rôle of the teacher is that of the intellectual midwife, "presiding at the birth of new ideas," and perhaps no discussion of the art of teaching will give him his cue so clearly as the passage in the *Theaetetus*, in which Socrates explains his method.

"Such are the midwives," says Socrates, after an explanation of their art which we may be spared, "whose task is a very important one, but not so important as mine; for women do

not bring into the world at one time real children, and at another time counterfeits which are with difficulty distinguished from them; if they did, then the discernment of the true and false birth would be the crowning achievement of the art of midwifery—you would think so?

“*Theaet.* Indeed I should.

“*Soc.* Well, my art of midwifery is in most respects like theirs; but differs, in that I attend men and not women, and I look after their souls when they are in labour, and not after their bodies: and the triumph of my art is in thoroughly examining whether the thought which the mind of the young man brings forth is a false idol or a noble and true birth. And like the midwives, I am barren, and the reproach which is often made against me, that I ask questions of others and have not the wit to answer them myself, is very just—the reason is, that the god compels me to be a midwife, but does not allow me to bring forth. And therefore I am not myself at all wise, nor have I anything to show which is the invention or birth of my own soul, but those who converse with me profit. Some of them appear dull enough at first, but afterwards, as our acquaintance ripens, if the god is gracious to them, they all make astonishing progress; and this in the opinion of others as well as in their own. It is quite clear that they never learned anything from me; the many fine discoveries to which

they cling are of their own making. But to me and the god they owe their delivery. And the proof of my words is, that many of them in their ignorance, either in their self-conceit despising me, or falling under the influence of others, have gone away too soon; and have not only lost the children of whom I had previously delivered them by an ill bringing up, but have stifled whatever else they had in them by evil communications, being fonder of lies and shams than of the truth; and they have at last ended by seeing themselves, as others see them, to be great fools. Aristeides, the son of Lysimachus, is one of them, and there are many others. The truants often return to me, and beg that I would consort with them again—they are ready to go to me on their knees—and then, if my familiar allows, which is not always the case, I receive them, and they begin to grow again. Dire are the pangs which my art is able to arouse and to allay in those who consort with me, just like the pangs of women in childbirth; night and day they are full of perplexity and travail which is even worse than that of the women. So much for them. And there are others, Theaetetus, who come to me apparently having nothing in them; and as I know that they have no need of my art, I coax them into marrying someone, and by the grace of God I can generally tell who is likely to do them good. Many of them I have given away to Prodicus, and many to other inspired sages. I tell you this

long story, friend Theaetetus, because I suspect, as indeed you seem to think yourself, that you are in labour—great with some conception. Come then to me, who am a midwife's son and myself a midwife, and do your best to answer the questions which I will ask you. And if I abstract and expose your first-born, because I discover upon inspection that the conception which you have formed is a vain shadow, do not quarrel with me on that account, as the manner of women is when their first children are taken from them. For I have actually known some who were ready to bite me when I deprived them of a darling folly; they did not perceive that I acted from goodwill, not knowing that no god is the enemy of man—that was not within the range of their ideas; neither am I their enemy in all this, but it would be wrong for me to admit falsehood, or to stifle the truth. Once more, then, Theaetetus, I repeat my old question, 'What is knowledge?'—and do not say that you cannot tell; but quit yourself like a man, and by the help of God you will be able to tell.

"Theaet. At any rate, Socrates, after such an exhortation I should be ashamed of not trying to do my best."

As a supplement to class discussion, we find individual conferences indispensable. There are shy students who need stimulus before they

can be induced to contribute to open discussion. There are endless misunderstandings to clear up, side lines to follow out, and matters to talk about which are too intimate for the rough open air of the class-room but which, nevertheless, it is of the utmost importance to the individual concerned to thresh out. And it is only in his relation to his students separately that the instructor can make sure of that individual progress which is the end of his work in class.

In the conference the teacher is no longer compelled to correct misunderstandings and false reasoning; instead he can do a much better thing—he can show the student where he is wrong in a way which will carry conviction. In another of Plato's dialogues, the *Sophist*, we have an explanation of this gentle art of refutation, which is full of meat for the English teacher who would do work of this character. The tone of it is strikingly different from that of the red-inked remarks which English teachers as a class are accustomed to write on the margins of themes.

“*Str.* There is the time-honoured mode which our fathers commonly practised towards their sons, and which is still adopted by many—either of roughly reproving their errors, or of gently advising them; which varieties may be correctly included under the general term of admonition.

“*Theaet.* True.

“*Str.* But whereas some appear to have arrived at the conclusion that all ignorance is involuntary, and that no one who thinks himself wise is willing to learn any of those things in which he is conscious of his own cleverness, and that the admonitory sort of instruction gives much trouble and does little good——

“*Theaet.* There they are quite right.

“*Str.* Accordingly, they set to work to eradicate the spirit of conceit in another way.

“*Theaet.* In what way?

“*Str.* They cross-examine a man's words, when he thinks that he is saying something and is really saying nothing, and easily convict him of inconsistencies in his opinions; these they then collect by the dialectical process, and placing them side by side, show that they contradict one another about the same things, in relation to the same things, and in the same respect. He, seeing this, is angry with himself, and grows gentle towards others, and thus is entirely delivered from great prejudices and harsh notions, in a way which is most amusing to the hearer, and produces the most lasting good effect on the person who is the subject of the operation. For

as the physician considers that the body will receive no benefit from taking food until the internal obstacles have been removed, so the purifier of the soul is conscious that his patient will receive no benefit from the application of knowledge until he is refuted, and from refutation learns modesty; he must be purged of his prejudices first and made to think that he knows only what he knows, and no more.

"Theaet. That is certainly the best and wisest state of mind.

"Str. For all these reasons, Theaetetus, we must admit that refutation is the greatest and chiefest of purifications, and he who has not been refuted, though he be the Great King himself, is in an awful state of impurity; he is uninstructed and deformed in those things in which he who would be truly blessed ought to be fairest and purest.

"Theaet. Very true."

Literature approached in the manner described above becomes real to the student. His intellectual curiosity, his sense of wonder, is quickened. He realizes that it is not a collection of historical facts, nor of critical opinions, not merely a number of more or less unintelligible "classics," but instead, a body of live thought which relates to his own life and is of

value to him in achieving his own ends—in defining the ends which he wishes to achieve. No man begins to acquire an education until he begins to think out his own aims, begins to see the relations between those aims and life as a whole, and to understand the relations between the different departments of knowledge. A point of view is no less necessary in getting an education than in writing a “description.” And while a point of view is something that a man’s teachers cannot give him, it is something which they can stimulate him to work out for himself.

Technical students bring to this work all the keenness which they have for their professional subjects. They find it at once liberal, in every fundamental sense of the term, and practical in every real sense of that. At the end of this, their first year’s work, they have learned something about writing from practice in the expression of real thought, and they have a deepened sense of the worth of their own profession and its place in the world, of its relation to those two great departments of thought,

science and literature. They are ready to read poetry and fiction and drama with real human interest, ready to find in them something which they can relate to their own problems. It is surprising how many engineering students, after such a course, express the desire to study philosophy and literature. They have a glimpse of the real function of literature—to unify life and to show men its meaning.

Work of this kind seems to us to have more value for strictly technical purposes than a course occupied exclusively with what is called “technical writing.” The student who can think straight, who can handle complicated ideas, who can balance opposite arguments and marshal them convincingly to the support of his conclusion, can handle any technical subject within the range of his technical ability. There is no “fool-proof” method or trick of writing engineering reports. An engineer who relies on a stereotyped form for constructing a report will turn out a machine-made product, devoid of real vitality. The problem is one demanding common-sense, perspective, power of clear

thought and clear expression, and that demand may as well be faced squarely.

But the value of such work is not limited to its bearing upon the actual writing which the engineer must do in the practice of his profession. Even more important is its educative value to the man, the approach it gives him to literature, the intellectual interests which it opens up to him, not as matters foreign to his work, but as vitally connected with it. If the engineer, who has created this new epoch of the manufacture of power, is to fulfill the promise made to society by his achievements hitherto, he must view society broadly, must address himself to the solution of its problems, which are human problems no less than material. In the education of this broad, liberal-minded engineer which society so badly needs, the study of the mother-tongue must be more than the acquirement of facts or a superficial accomplishment: it must be a training in thought, the influence of which is to clarify and humanize the student's character and his aims in life.



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